

The **LONE WOLF RETURNS**

By **LOUIS JOSEPH
VANCE**

Illustrated with scenes from the Photoplay
A Columbia Production - Directed by Ralph Ince
Featuring Bert Lytell and Billie Dove



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The Lone Wolf Returns

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of

**The Dark Mirror, Alias the Lone Wolf,
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Michael Lanyard—"The Lone Wolf," as the Paris police and criminal world called him, from his habit of invariably working without a confederate—is one of the best known and most romantic figures in the fiction of crime.

There is something fascinating in the coolness and cleverness of this gentleman among crooks, something appealing in the surprising extent of his knowledge of art and good society, and in the masterly cleanness of his coups.

In this new account of his more recent activities, when, urged on by his love for a good woman, he stages a life-and-death fight against a powerful underworld gang headed by the "Bootlegger King" of New York, Mr. Vance has given us what will be generally hailed as by all odds the best of his "Lone Wolf" stories.

LOOK ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS JACKET

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THE LONE WOLF RETURNS



A Columbia Pictures Corporation Production.

The Lone Wolf Returns.

BILLIE DOVE AS EVE DE MONTALAIS
AND BERT LYTELL AS THE LONE WOLF.

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LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

AUTHOR OF
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THE DARK MIRROR, ETC.

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FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A COLUMBIA PRODUCTION



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To

FRANK EDWIN VERNEY

because he asked for more and
because there won't be any more

The Lone Wolf Returns

I

"I LOVE you," said Michael Lanyard.

He spoke in French; and that simple phrase, covered by the surging song of strings and woodwinds, was inaudible to other ears. Only the woman with him heard and, hearing, roused from the reverie into which she too insensibly had lapsed, turning back from the prismatic pageantry of the dance eyes whose grave regard gave never a clue to the emotions his words inspired.

Making no more acknowledgment than this, she studied him intently but kindly, touched by the wistfulness that shadowed the demeanour of unpretending dignity which she had learned to like best of all the many phases of the man their friendship had revealed.

The severity of evening dress in line and lack of colour became him well, setting off the lean, sculptured contours of his face, giving value to its even warmth of tone. Traces of silver at his temples hinted at that history, not too happy, with which she was in part acquainted. The strength with which his mouth was modelled affected her, as always, with a faint, strangely pleasant thrill of alarm, the dark, clear eyes, at once

deferential and demanding, held her in a spell she had no wish to break.

"I love you," he repeated.

Her brows took on a quaintly plaintive cast. "I know, my friend," she replied in the same tongue and tone. "For a long time I have known . . . as you have known my love was all for you. And yet . . ." The slender shoulders lifting their fairness out of the corsage of her jetted gown sketched a shrug.

"I had to wait to tell you," he said, "till I was sure—"

In indulgent raillery she interrupted: "Sure that you loved me?"

He smiled, but wagged his head in stubborn earnestness: "Sure of what else I must say."

"There is more?"

"Much more." The man leaned over the table, with an even deeper accent of sincerity in his guarded voice: "I love you so dearly, Eve, the thought of a life without you is beyond my understanding . . . Yet I may not ask you to be my wife."

"May not?" Hands of consummate grace fluttered above the cloth in tragicomic impatience. "Or will not?"

"Will not because I may not."

Eve de Montalais held a small pause of perplexity, made a small sign of frustration. "It is a riddle," she said. "But when one speaks in riddles, one speaks playfully . . . as you do not. Tell me, then, my Michael! why you think you may not ask me to marry you, when between us all else has been said?"

"I love you too well—"

"Too well to make me happy?"

"Too well to let you stake your happiness on the hazards of such a life as mine."

"You forget, if you deny me the right to share those hazards, whatever they may be, I shall have no happiness to risk."

"You are young," the man thoughtfully stated, "the best of your life lies before you. And you are, I think, the loveliest woman that ever lived. Many men after me will long for and love you, one of them you will find worthy . . ."

"Still, you forget, my heart is given."

"Time heals all memories."

"You believe that?" She withdrew a little, settling back in her chair, and used her fan, gazing away over its nodding plumes. "I was mistaken, then; I believed you loved me too well to hold my love the whim of a day or a month or a year. I thought you knew me too well to think my love was lightly given, or once given might be recalled."

He winced under that reproach. "Without your help," he pleaded, "how shall I be strong? You know what it costs me to say what I am saying, that I could not say anything to displease you if I held your happiness second to my own. It is of you alone I am thinking; you whom I love and who are not for me."

"If you love me," Eve de Montalais said quietly, "you will never leave me."

"Better that; better you should learn to hold the memory of me in contempt, than I should risk your

waking up too late, as some day you would surely waken, to realize you had joined your life to the life of one whom the world esteems a common thief."

"'The world esteems'!" Disdain touched her lips. "You are not that."

"I was once—"

"The past is dead."

"Or merely sleeping? Who shall say?"

"Ah no! my friend, you waste your time if you ask me to believe that."

The music fell, and the gay rumour of voices that replaced it, as the dancers began to move back to their tables, was not enough to warrant the former sense of security from eavesdropping by inadvertence or intention. In tacit silence Madame de Montalais extended her hand, Lanyard offered his cigarette-case, then a match. But after a single inhalation the woman forgot to smoke, and permitted the tobacco to fume to waste in its jewelled holder, her attention seemingly diverted by the pomp and vanity of that sumptuous cavern wherein the folk of her world were accustomed nightly to foregather and play yet once again the time-old game whose fascination never fails, whose stake is love . . .

But Lanyard had eyes for his love alone.

Her beauty in his sight was like a pain in his heart, a hand at his throat. Slender and gracious and fair, with a sense, hard to define, of something more than human in that warmly human loveliness, something that made one think of a sickle of moon afloat in an azure midnight sky, of dawnlight fleeting breathlessly athwart a summer sea . . .

His for the asking!

He had loved before, but never as now, never with this tenderness, this all-possessing wish to serve and safeguard, this passionate self-abnegation . . .

"What is it?" he asked, seeing her start, with an almost imperceptible suggestion of aversion, as she sat looking away across the room.

"That man," she replied—"that creature, rather, whom one never sees without shuddering. And one sees him everywhere."

Even before he looked Lanyard had divined the occasion of this antipathy. It was true, what she had said: ever since this tide in their affairs had brought these two together in New York, no matter where they turned of an evening in quest of amusement, or rather for an excuse to be with each other, at some time in its course they seemed fated to cross the path of this personality, odd, compelling, and in some how forbidding.

One saw the man now, with a party of guests laying claim to a table on the far side of the floor, a table that had been conspicuously reserved and refused to others, though the Crystal Room was crowded and late-comers were importunate. A gross body, ponderous and slow of movement, with a heavy face of singularly immobile cast, resembling and for all its fleshiness as destitute of colour as a mask of papier-mâché, with a strange effect of transparency as if lighted by an inner glow akin to phosphorescence. Punctiliously mannered and at all times dressed with the nicest care as to the cut and propriety of his clothing, but unfail-

ingly bedecked like a sultan with an incalculable wealth of jewellery in sets meticulously matched; yesterday with emeralds, today with diamonds, tomorrow with rubies, at another time it might be with fire-opals burning on fingers and watch chain, serving as cuff-links, waistcoat buttons, and studs for his shirt: a bizarre shape to meet in the haunts of fashion . . . And never alone, always surrounded by a little court of sycophants, seldom twice of the same composition, but as a rule including a few fragile beauties, apparently of the stage, and invariably one whom Lanyard took to be a paid clown, an undersized man with the face of a sage droll, the dress and deportment of a diplomat, and something in his fixed solemnity which suggested an ever-present expectation that his lightest word would win a gale of laughter—as, indeed, more often than not it seemed to.

The other sat, as by habit, taciturn and aloof in the heart of his noisy company. A dull man or a deep. Speaking seldom, eating little, drinking nothing, always smoking, holding one pose without stir for long minutes at a time: only the eyes beneath hood-like lids, eyes of a repellant pallor and surprising brightness, were restless, ranging from face to face, not only of his companions but of every person within his scope of vision, peering into each with a steadfast, imperturbable and penetrating curiosity . . .

Lanyard had more than once been resentfully conscious of that prying look. He was conscious of it now and rather hoped its author could read his lips, reckoning its impertinence ample provocation for the temper of what he was about to say.

"The Sultan of Loot," he mused aloud, adding in answer to Eve's mirthful glance: "my private nickname for the animal. If it does him injustice, he ought to take in his sign, don't you think? I know him by sight, of course; but that is all. Some bucketeer or bootlegger, no doubt; Prohibition no less than Providence makes strange bedfellows, nowadays, in this mad country."

"Strange," the woman observed, "how people one doesn't know sometimes seem to haunt one."

"When it is strange."

Her eyes narrowed. "Why do you say that, Michael?"

"I hardly know," he confessed with a deprecatory laugh. "More, at least, than this: that it has seldom been my fortune to be so haunted without something in the nature of a sequel."

She made a mental shudder graphic. "In this instance, for your sake, I trust the rule will not hold good."

"I hope so, indeed. I entertain the least inclination imaginable to better my acquaintance with that monsieur. And yet, it would surprise me not at all if I were to see much more of him before I see less."

There was music again, a retrograde movement from tables to open floor.

"Why so mysterious, Michael?"

"Upon my word, I can't tell you. Why did you shiver when you spoke of the fellow? Blame it, if you like, to that sixth sense, that instinct of self-preservation which serves some men as intuition serves most

women—call it what you will, I have quite definitely a feeling I am no more done with that one whom I do not know than I am as yet begun with him.”

A sidelong glance discovered the personage in question indulging in one of his rare smiles, an introspective smile that might mean he had indeed been reading Lanyard's lips, or might mean nothing of the sort. True, that he was no longer looking at Lanyard; it remained equally true that he was apparently paying no attention to the conversation of his company.

“And that is why”—a derisive shift of the woman's eyes indicated the quarter of the room in which the subject of their speculations had established himself—“you are trying to jilt me—is it?—and excusing your ungallant conduct with vague references to the ‘hazards’ of your life!”

Lanyard shook his head, again possessed by the gravity of his purpose. “I am scarcely so childish,” he said. “But for days—for months, indeed, but especially in these last few days—I have been thinking of the life I have to offer a wife, the life of a man hunted, without fortune or position, friendless in a strange land but for you.”

“‘Hunted’?”

The echo deprecated the strength of that term, but he would not modify it. “Hunted,” he reiterated: “the life of an outlaw. Society does not forgive: it will sometimes applaud a successful transgressor, but it never has patience with the penitent.”

“Tell me why you say that, Michael. I have the right to know.”

"It is this, then," Lanyard said with reluctance: "wherever I go, I am a marked man. The world wears mocking eyebrows when it hears that the Lone Wolf no longer prowls. 'Perhaps, today,' it says: 'but wait. Let him prove his sincerity and fortitude against the dead drag of my indifference, let him make his way if he can, I have my own affairs to busy me.' . . . The police are satisfied my change of character is merely a blind. Another class, even more skeptic, is made up of those whose lot today is as mine was yesterday, creatures of envy, greed, and uncharitableness, all those qualities that make criminals. These, should they see me in rags, would say: 'Another turn or two of the screw and he will be one of us again.' Seeing me apparently prosperous, they say: 'Observe that he wants for nothing: he is cunning, that one.' Or suppose some unknown makes a famous coup; the chorus is then: 'The Lone Wolf has done this thing!' . . . Society indifferent, its police distrustful, its enemies envious: one needs strength to make way against so strong a tide!"

"You have it."

"But will it last?"

"With mine to comfort and encourage you when your strength wearies . . ."

"But figure to yourself a possible event: We marry. What happens? Your friends are affronted, they turn from you—"

"Did you call them friends?"

"Even friendship fails when its self-esteem is flouted. . . . You are left alone," Lanyard obstinately

pursued, "but for me. And for every friend you have lost, you have found an enemy—my enemies. These good haters of mine will resort to every expedient to poison your mind against me, while to me they will come saying, 'Do as we bid you or prepare yourself to see her suffer.' Conceive me mad enough to tell them to go to the devil: the next time we find ourselves conspicuously placed in public, a hand falls on my shoulder, I your husband am arrested on a trumped-up charge. Assume that I clear myself: still the disgrace remains, the shame. And I its cause. . . . No! never ask me to condemn you to a life like that."

He sat brooding, in a silence which she respected for a little, watching him with shrewd vision all the while.

"Something has happened," she said at length, "to make you think such things."

"You are right." He nodded sadly: "I have come to my senses. These months I have spent in almost daily association with you have been the happiest of my life. I have been too happy . . . They can't continue: I love you too well."

The plumed fan was arrested, the woman's eyes grew wide and dark, her breathing quickened. "What do you propose?"

"I think you must know . . ."

"Tell me!"

He entreated her with haggard eyes. "Since we may not marry, what else can I do but go my way?"

"No!" she impatiently countered. "There is something more in your mind than you have told me."

"Neither there nor in my heart."

"You are keeping something back for fear of frightening me: some danger threatens you—!"

"Nothing."

"Nevertheless you have reason to fear—"

"I have always to be on my guard. Misfortune visits in strange guises, and most often unannounced. For myself, I am accustomed to that; I do not greatly care. But for you—that is another matter."

The fan resumed its weaving. After a pause Eve said: "If you must go, so be it. But 'whither thou goest, there go I'—"

"No!"

"It matters not how far," she nodded. "What is it to me where I live, so I am with you?"

"Can you require that of me?"

"I!" she cried, startled—"of *you?*"

"You are a woman of this world, Eve. Do I not know? Can I forget how you were when I found you, buried to life in that isolate château half a hundred years to the south of Paris? Can I not see what a change has come over you in these few months of your own New York?"

"Of you—"

But he would not listen. "You were born and bred to breathe this atmosphere. Can you ask me to doom you to exile in some hole or corner, some place so lost that the whisper of my ill fame will not find it? Some kraal in South Africa!—an iron hut in the Australian bush!—where else? . . . You would die of such a life, or live only to learn to hate me."

"Never that. Love outweighs all."

"So we tell ourselves, so we believe, till we are required to lay down for love even our self-respect. Could I retain that—could I forgive myself—knowing I had robbed you of all that had made life fair for you, and left you only the happiness of giving up your life for love?"

"Selfishness speaks there . . ."

"Vanity, the father of selfishness, is present in every human affair. It is not a pretty thought; but men and women in this world are made that way. There is my vanity, too, to be thought of." Lanyard had a wry, apologetic smile. "Consider that you have never known a want you could not gratify out of your private means; while I am a penniless adventurer, a man living from hand to mouth, today on a modest pension, tomorrow on God knows what . . ."

"At last!" said Eve de Montalais: "it is that, then, your pride that stands between us."

"A man with less is not a man whom you could love."

She made no direct reply, but after a time sat up and began to gather round her the folds of her wrap.

"I am a little weary," she told Lanyard. "There is more to be said than you have said, my Michael! but not now, not here . . . Perhaps another night . . . Please take me home."

II

THE breath of that November night was soft and warm, its dim sky distilled a pensive rain with frequent lulls. Burnished by the daily traffic of eighty thousand tires the wet pave of the Avenue resembled a broad channel of black marble veined with pulsing gold. Over churning tides of after-theatre travel the police towers watched like great gaunt goblins, stabbing the misty mirk with angry eyes, ruby, emerald, and amber.

The brougham drifted sedately with the northbound press; its pace all too swift notwithstanding, its journey too quickly accomplished. Yet neither of the lovers had spoken since leaving the Ritz. Only when the grey palisades of the Hotel Walpole loomed ahead, spangled with the gilt of a thousand windows, the woman stirred in her corner and sat forward, peering with fond concern into the face of the man, giving him her hands.

"Be patient with me, Michael," she said. "It isn't that I can't read your heart—I know, my dear, I know! . . . All you said just now was true enough; but all the truth has not yet been said. Neither are my wits as ready as yours. You must give me time to think. You will, I know."

"I am altogether yours," he answered. "Your happiness is all that matters."

"Not all, not my happiness alone, but yours as well—ours!"

She swayed into his arms; for the first time Lanyard knew her lips . . .

He came to himself, after a fashion, standing bare of head beneath a lamp-fringed canopy of bronze and glass, formally touching her fingers and mouthing polite phrases as to a woman he barely knew . . . Absurd!

And on her part only enriched colour and a heightened radiance in her eyes betrayed the revolutionary work of those too few moments.

"Tomorrow," he heard Eve saying . . . "No: not tomorrow; I'm dining with the Druces. The day after. Call for me early, Michael: we'll have a long drive and a little dinner somewhere in the country."

Her look said so much more, he had no certain knowledge of what he stammered in response. But presumably the phrases served. She nodded gayly, ran up the steps. He watched her whisk through the revolving door and fade away from view in the hot illumination of the foyer before it occurred to him to cover his head. And his stare was vacant when her chauffeur delayed him with a respectful query; to which, after a moment, Lanyard replied, many thanks, but he felt more in the humour for a stroll than to be motored to his rooms; he wouldn't mind the drizzle.

The goblin eyes blinking from red to green, he profited by the interruption of up-and-down-town travel to cross to the west side of the Avenue before settling into stride for a walk of a mile to his modest

lodgings; in a mood of exaltation too rare to countenance return of those misgivings to which he had that night for the first time given voice, those doubts and fears by which his lonelier hours of late had none the less been ridden, ever since he had learned that his love for Eve de Montalais had grown to be a passion passing his strength to withstand.

He had done his best but had essayed the impossible tonight, in attempting to make her see that marriage between them were for her a madness. He admitted that, now he knew of her own confession that she loved him. Now with the music of her incomparable voice still chiming that assurance in his memory, now with the fragrance of her lips lingering on his own, Lanyard knew that whether he had fought well or ill to save her from himself, the fight was lost; one course alone remained to him: to do away with every hindrance to the firm establishment of Eve's happiness, to reorganize his life so that every objection to their union might be compromised, every echo of the past silenced, every embarrassment of the present compensated.

A task to tax the wits and heart of a superman, contemplation of it in that hour affected Lanyard with no dismay: armoured in and inspired by her love he could not fail.

In this ecstatic temper only subconsciously aware of his surroundings, the man was measuring off a round four miles an hour, southbound on the sidewalk over across from the Cathedral, when that occurred which brought his head down from the clouds: the sema-

phores signalled for another suspension of traffic on the Avenue, and an instant later a taxicab inexpertly driven at unlawful speed passed Lanyard crabwise, skidding wildly on the greasy asphaltum as its chauffeur threw out clutch and applied brakes to avoid crashing into a file of cars debouching from West Fiftieth street.

An old-fashioned, gloomy contraption, of that high-chested hobbledehoy type now fast becoming extinct, the cab performed two complete revolutions like a skittish monstrosity chasing its tail, and toppled perilously as if minded to try a somersault as well, before it brought up, rocking and growling, broadside to the curb.

From its black pocket of a body noises of embittered expostulation were issuing in a woman's voice and a foreign tongue; neither the voice of a gentlewoman nor language such as one would employ with whatever provocation. It was to Lanyard, indeed, like a souvenir of younger years to hear that broadside of vituperation couched in the argot of the thieves' kitchens of Paris. And at a discreet distance he paused, diverted, humanly hoping for the worst.

At the same time a badly rattled driver, comprehending no word of the abuse cascading upon his head but sensitive enough to its tone, tumbled off his box and made for the door, vainly seeking to make an authentic brogue audible. But his hand was no sooner lifted to its latch than the door flew open in his face and a lovely lady in resplendent attire and a towering fury bounced out and—a figure of flaming colour in the blue-blacks of the nocturnal scheme—addressed

herself to the man with gesticulation so vividly adequate to her temper that instinctively he lifted both arms to guard his features and, stumbling over his own heels in panic retreat, sat down with suddenness and shocking force.

No national spirit is so exquisitely responsive as that of the French to comedy of physical misadventure. When the chauffeur coming into contact with the sidewalk gave up his breath in one vast "*Ouf!*" his fare forgot to be angry, bit a blistering epithet in two, and incontinently passed into such spasms of mirth that she was fain to lean her finery against the dripping side of the cab lest her limbs refuse to sustain her. And while she shook and held her sides and uttered peal upon peal of laughter—heedlessly permitting her wrap to fall open and expose to the inclement air the most cynical of décolletages framing flesh quite literally crusted with jewels—the chauffeur was scrambling to his feet in a rage that threatened to rival her own late transports, and a crowd was beginning to gather, too, as crowds will in New York, upon any provocation, in any street, at any hour of any day or night. On which accounts Lanyard reckoned in time to interfere.

Hurriedly consulting the taximeter, he stepped between the two, fished a bill from his pocket, and thrust it into the palm of the chauffeur before this last comprehended what was happening.

"None of that!" he enjoined, raising a peremptory voice to drown the snarl with which the man was tuning up to repay abuse and derision with the drippings of his own vocabulary. "You've got your fare, so

clear out before this officer whom I see approaching hands you a summons for careless driving. D'you hear?—not another word!"

And as the chauffeur, cowed by this appearance of authority, shut a gaping mouth and stumbled to his seat, Lanyard turned to the woman and caught her arm in a firm grasp. "Come, Liane! compose yourself. I'll find you another cab."

The woman responded with a moment of stupefied silence during which her eyes incredulously rounded, then with a squeal of rapture—"Lanyarrrrd!"—and an impulsive offer to enfold him to that generous bosom, which only clever footwork foiled.

"Michael!" she cried in French—"my Michael! Of all men living the one whom I most have longed to find!"

"Observe that the lost is now found," he advised in the same language, smiling. "But be so amiable as not to keep me waiting here in the rain. Pull yourself together, Liane—your wrap as well, if you don't want to catch cold in your chest—in most of it, at least." In a more urgent voice he added: "Can you not understand your danger? Cover yourself, Liane—you are mad to expose such treasure on a public street at night!"

"What flattery!" the woman demurely responded. Nevertheless she did as he bade, clipping her cloak at the throat with one hand while the other slipped beneath his arm. "I am so overjoyed to find you again, my dear friend, I do not believe any evil could affect me. But come . . ."

She tugged him out of the grinning ring that had begun to form, and away from the kerb, where the grumbling chauffeur was settling into place behind his wheel, and where Lanyard had been preparing to beckon in the first vacant cab.

"But you want another taxi—"

"Not I, monsieur. It is but a step, where I am going. As for this rain, it is nothing"—she held out a hand—"already it has ceased. And surely I can count upon your gallantry . . ."

He consented with entire good-nature—"As ever, irresistible, Liane!"—and found himself with the woman on his arm rounding the corner and moving toward Sixth avenue. "New York, by what appears, has the honour of entertaining you once again . . ."

"Again? But still, if you please."

"Proving the weakness of deductive reasoning," he observed. "When one saw you in a hired cab, one inferred you were merely a bird of passage."

"But I have never been away, monsieur, never since that luckless voyage landed us here last Spring. I find it amusing, this great town; as Paris is no more, alas! thanks to the War and the poor health of the franc. . . . As for that infamous taxicab, I ask you: what is one to do when one's own car is, as these quaint Americans put it, laid out?"

"Laid up."

"Laid out or laid up—it is all the same."

"I believe you," Lanyard chuckled—"at my age, Liane."

He was aware, but seemed not to be, of sidelong scrutiny, keenly inquisitive.

"Is it that you begin to find yourself bored with this America, Michael?"

"Ah!" he parried—"I must not complain."

"The old life calls, eh?" (So she construed that equivoque as confirming her surmise; which argued an anxiety to do so. But why?) "You miss something, my friend, in this land where more things are verboten than in Germany before the War?"

"I miss my youth," Lanyard admitted with a rueful laugh—"those misspent years!"

"You would have them back?" she inquisitively demanded. "What for? To misspend them all over again?" He smiled illegibly; she laughed in impish glee. "I felt sure of it, when I thought of you today, Michael, I said to myself: By this time he will be well weary of this country of atrocious cookery, ice-water, and virtue with the indigestion."

"You, then, knew I was still here?"

"One was so informed."

"One has, it seems, friends of whose kind interest one was unaware."

"It was a little bird that told me."

"An idle little bird, if it finds no better gossip to twitter than the tale of my dull days."

"It is truly as I said!" She squeezed his arm. "You *are* bored. So, then! a little patience and you will call it, as I do, a happy chance that threw me in your way tonight."

"Impossible that one should esteem it otherwise."

Lanyard smiled down at the woman, openly taking advantage of the illumination of a street lamp to study her.

In her day reputed the most beautiful demi-mondaine in Paris and the most dangerous, the old allure of her charms, by this tricky light at least, seemed unimpaired; while that she was still dangerous one had memories of events by no means stale to prove. And now what diablerie was she fostering behind that mask of fair, seductive flesh? what mischief had she in mind that required his co-operation?

An innate flair for anything in the nature of an intrigue stirred in its sleep, lifted its head, sniffed the wind with eager nostrils . . .

They came to Sixth avenue, where the hand under his arm gently led him south again, in the shadow of the Elevated.

"A long 'step' to this rendezvous of yours, Liane."

"Patience: we are nearly there. Or is it that your soul has grown so deeply ennuied even I—?"

"To the contrary, as you see, I am coming along quite peaceably. I have but one regret."

"And that?"

"It desolates me to know we must part so soon."

"This way, impostor." Guiding him across the Avenue, the woman held on toward Broadway. "What hour is it, do you know?"

"A quarter to one," Lanyard reported on the advice of his watch.

"Then I am fifteen minutes beforehand—"

"That is to say, practically unsexed."

"Furthermore, my friends are never on time. Why not keep me company while I wait, and enjoy a little raking over of old scandals?"

"It would be a pleasure, Liane; but are you sure—?"

"We are arrived."

The woman was diverging toward a dwelling which wore an aspect of too much decorum; a modest establishment with just two windows on the street level diffusing a benign, domestic glow through heavy draperies behind stout bars of iron, and a tight-lipped look about the solid door at the back of its mildly lighted vestibule.

Coupling the atmosphere of its environment, which was both tawdry and rowdy, with certain rumours that had come to his attention, the reticent expression of the house with the rank of private cars that lined the kerb before it, Lanyard hazarded with an accent of distaste: "The Clique Club, eh?"

"You are acquainted?"

"With its reputation only. One hears that the percentage of mortality resulting from indulgence in its bootliquor is unusually low."

"Do you suspect me of luring you here to poison you, Michael?"

"Not while you remain incontestibly the mistress of weapons so much more deadly than moonshine. Moreover, it is written in my horoscope, curiosity will be the death of me."

Liane giggled, planting a finger on a push-button which, Lanyard remarked, she located without looking. By way of response a horizontal slit opened in the upper half of the door, and through this a pair of anonymous eyes appraised them, Lanyard without favour, but otherwise in respect of the woman. Then with an impressive clanking and thumping of chains

and bolts the door swung wide, disclosing an entry, the habitat of a good actor in the make-up of a movie gangster, functioning as Cerberus to this institution of post-Prohibition New York. And passing through a second and less formidable door, Lanyard and the woman entered a reception-hall of voluptuous embellishment and devilishly subtle illumination.

Here, in a chair before an ardent grate, a youthful odalisque was lounging with crossed knees, a waspy young blood of the town was holding a pose of elegance, with elbow on the mantel, and both were engaging in conversation an overmannered person distinguished by ornate evening dress and the beak and bald head of a bird of prey; a scene that might readily have passed for one in a private home but for wild squalls of jazz drifting down the broad staircase and the vibration of the floor above with the rhythmical shuffle and stamp of many feet.

At sight of the newcomers the hairless Wonder with a perfect bow excused himself to his gossips, and glided forward, smirking, shaping deferential shoulders, giving his bleached talons a good air-wash.

"Mademoiselle Delorme!" he uttered in accents of intense gratification.

"Good evening, Theodore," Liane gave him in French, with friendly nonchalance. "Monsieur Morphew is here so soon, no?"

"Not yet, mademoiselle. But before long, beyond doubt . . ."

"The usual room? We will go up and wait . . . But I believe you do not know Monsieur Lanyard, Theodore."

"The Clique Club is so unfortunate," Theodore deplored, saluting Lanyard profoundly, "as not to number monsieur among its members."

"And very stupid of it, if you ask me," Liane retorted. "See that he gets a card, will you."

"You are much too gracious, Liane; I shall have so little use for a guest-card—"

"What are you talking about, Michael? Guest-card! I should say not. I am proposing you for membership. It costs nothing when one is properly introduced. Eh, Theodore?"

"As mademoiselle says . . . If Monsieur Lanyard will be so kind as to let me have his address . . ."

With a shrug, Lanyard gave in. After all, it didn't matter. . . . And when he had duly been entered in the club register, Theodore escorted the newly fledged member to the foot of the stairs, upon which Liane Delorme was picturesquely waiting, and there turned both over to the guidance of a highly polished subaltern.

Wide doorways on the first landing disclosed a chain of rooms dedicated to the rites of jazz, liquid, instrumental, terpsichorean. Calculated to remind a crusading clergyman of Belshazzar's Feast, they reminded Lanyard of almost any Broadway restaurant at midnight.

On the second landing, however, a break in the dance music below made audible the heartless laughter of an ivory ball coquetting with a roulette wheel behind one closed door, while a waiter emerging from another room permitted a glimpse of a private supper party

at the peak of its lead, an interior tolerably Hogarthian.

Lanyard exchanged amused glances with Liane. "Busy little club," he commented, "but wants re-christening—Clique's far too conservative—should be known as the Liberal."

At the rear end of the hall another door admitted to a prettily furnished supper room, where a table was being laid and, in coolers on a side-table, several bottles of champagne were enjoying their last rest. Requesting the waiter in attendance to open one of these, Liane shrugged out of her wrap—which Lanyard took, though he kept his overcoat on by way of pointing an intention to stop for a few minutes only—and having made herself at ease upon the club fender of an open fire, clinked her glass to Lanyard's.

"To you, my too-long lost friend, and to me—to a friendship that has known too many interruptions and must henceforth know fewer."

He toasted with cool ambiguity: "To a rapport more complete."

With professional ease the waiter faded from their knowledge; and the woman dimpled bewitchingly, patting the broad seat of the fender.

"Come, sit by my side, Michael: let us talk."

"With all the pleasure in life," he assented, placing himself at a discreeter distance than she had designated—"on one condition, my dear Liane: none of your artfulness."

"Michael!" she reproached, delighted—"you don't trust me?"

"Really, you read one's mind."

"Don't be alarmed, my old one." She made a face to match her tone of mocking reassurance. "I was mad about you once, I don't deny; but that was long ago. Besides, you little know me if you think it likely I would lay myself open to be scorned another time."

"I little know you," Lanyard conceded, "whatever I may think; and I've got the quaintest notion, Liane, that the less I learn about you the more likely I am to enjoy ordinary peace of mind. Be a good child, now; treat me as you would a father, not as you might a prospective papa. Tell me: what the deuce is your little game?"

"'Game'?" she repeated, petulant. "Michael, my dear! your manners aren't as good as they were when your morals were worse."

"Admit that you didn't ask me up here to amuse yourself with innocent flirtation."

"That is true."

"Admit, then, I am pardonably curious."

"Well! if you will have the truth . . . When I got over being foolish about you, Michael . . . How long ago it seems!"

"A good half-year."

"I found I was still fond of you. When all's said about that sad affair, you know, it was I who was rather a devil, and you who were rather a dear. I owe you for more than one good turn I never did anything to deserve."

"I wish I might think your associates in that adventure had come out of it as well disposed."

"That absurd Monk, that clown Phinuit! Why bother your head about such canaille?"

"And what has become of the precious pair?"

Plump but pretty shoulders described a gesture of indifference. "I know nothing of them since that day when last you saw us all together. I was out of patience with them then—as I think you guessed. When you dismissed us, I sent them packing. And you?" Lanyard, smiling, shook his head, and the woman cheerfully consigned reminiscences to the grave of those dead yesterdays where they belonged. "Tell me now about yourself."

"What is there to tell?"

"Much, monsieur. You are a mystery."

"I am flattered . . ."

"That's all blague," the woman scoffed. "You know I'm interested in all you do. I've just told you so, and why." She endured his quizzical scrutiny with a frank and friendly countenance, more entertained than irritated by his mistrust. "Surely, my dear! you've not been misbehaving so badly you need hesitate to confide in me."

"But a little while ago you were telling me my life was dull."

"You don't find it so?"

"You might the tale of it. Tastes differ."

"One is to infer your conduct has been good?"

"Irreproachable—by certain standards."

"Mine?" Liane twinkled—"or yours?"

"Yours certainly, since I hesitate to bore you."

"But you are provoking! And not at all polite."

Lanyard looked apologetic and said nothing. "Very well, then! if you won't answer when I ask you prettily, I presume I shall have to tell you all I know about yourself."

Lanyard pricked up his ears. "The little bird again?"

She solemnly nodded. "It is industrious; every day it brings me news of this and that."

"And it tells you what of this?"

"Enough to make you what I styled you a moment ago: a mystery."

"Is it permitted to ask, how a mystery?"

"Assuredly. To begin with: It is now six months since you settled down, apparently to vegetate in this dry climate."

"You distrust appearance?"

"Always when so far out of character. It is not like Michael Lanyard to become static all at once. But here you live quietly, in the cheapest decent lodgings, you have no callers, you write few letters, you see no friends—but one—and spend no money on yourself; only when you are seen in public with Madame de Montalais you seem indifferent to expense. You see—?"

"I see one thing plainly: that it were well to put salt on the tail of that little bird and wring its damned neck."

"But you do not see that this is, in one of your history, questionable conduct? It is too much like reversion to your old days, when you lived solitary and worked alone, making the name of the Lone Wolf

famous in Europe by following out your theory that a thief to be successful should have no friends to betray him."

"But today!" Lanyard remonstrated—"the source of this astonishingly detailed and accurate information about my modest habits can hardly have failed to assure itself that they are all well within the law."

"On the surface. As were those of Michael Lanyard, the world-known Parisian connoisseur of art before the War. But the cunning that made it possible for the Lone Wolf to maintain that disguise, unsuspected by the keenest criminal investigators of the Continent, has not necessarily failed with years. To the contrary: what you did once you should be able to do again, with even greater success, since you are now older, less hot-headed, more astute. Let me tell you, my dear friend!" the woman concluded with an unmistakable note of earnestness: "they have great respect for your abilities, those who are interested in you today."

"It seems, then," said Lanyard after a reflective pause, "I have to thank you for a warning."

"I would be an ungrateful wretch did I fail to give it, who owe you my life twice over at least."

"I think we may call that debt cancelled if you'll answer one question."

"No questions!" A jewelled hand flashed a sign of refusal. "I have said more than was wise as it is."

He persisted: "You won't tell me—?"

"Ask me nothing, my friend," Liane Delorme begged. "But use your wits; they will tell you more

than I dare, perhaps—fond as I am of you, Michael—they are more to be trusted. Remember, with women like me self-interest is ever at work. Perhaps it may be that the pleasure of seeing you tonight has made me for once self-forgetful, another time may find me less indiscreet."

"I will be careful," Lanyard said gravely, "not to expect too much . . ."

With equal gravity she responded: "Then you will be wise."

"And now," he concluded, rising, "your friends can't be much longer; I mustn't put them to the trouble of kicking me out."

Liane put out a hand and caught his. "But I wish you to stay. I promise you will be welcome. My friends will be delighted. One of them in especial I am anxious you should know. You will find him well worth your while, one of the most interesting men in New York, quite a social power in his way."

"In his way—?"

"A quiet way, my friend, but a very real one."

There was more meaning in her eyes than in her words. Lanyard hung in doubt. Impossible to misread the sincerity of her desire to have him stay on. But her motive?

He had delayed too long. Voices sounded in the hallway, the gay accents of a woman predominating. Then the door opened; five people entered.

III

THE first was a pretty young thing, piquantly fair and petite, with glowing face and merry eyes, at sight of whom Lanyard felt warranted in breathing an invocation to his prophetic soul. For now, it seemed, chance or predestination was making good that presentiment to which he had confessed during supper at the Ritz.

This brilliant little shape of life in the dark rectangle of the doorway had been conspicuously one of that party whose forbidding host had excited the aversion of Eve de Montalais and, in himself, half-formed forebodings. The man at whom she was so gayly gurgling over her shoulder, who wore both topper and grin at the doggish slant which becomes the author of an amusingly improper wheeze, was the little chap of the weazenened wise mask whom Lanyard privately reckoned court jester to the Sultan of Loot. The latter in very person bulked in the shadowy background provided by the corridor, a presence vast but vague, betrayed by the baleful burning of fire opals as a thunderhead on a summer's night may remain more sensed than seen till a glimer of lightning lends definition to its loom. Behind lurked a fourth, a figure still more indefinite. And in the rear a gleam picked out the hairless poll of Theodore, inclined at a servile angle.

Discovering Liane Delorme all at once, the lady on

the threshold registered rapture, then ran to her with glad hands extended, her slight little body bearing an extravagant wrap of Russian sables with a grace as dainty as a fay's. Lips that didn't need paint to point their pretty contours bubbling joyously—"Darling Liane! You luscious thing! How we've missed you!"—she precipitated herself into Liane's arms and printed inconsiderate kisses upon that studiously composed complexion. When she permitted Liane to disengage and present Lanyard, he received an almost disconcertingly cordial smile and a tiny hand on which blazed in insolent beauty what he rated at first glance the most exquisite emeralds he had ever seen, who in his day had been somewhat an amateur of emeralds.

"Mr. Lanyard!"—Liane's introduction had been effected in English—"I *am* so glad to know you. It seems to me Liane knows all the interesting people—and nobody else."

"One trusts very truly you will not find need tonight to revise that recommendation," Lanyard returned, bowing low over the little hand. He added with an enquiring inflexion, because he wasn't sure of having caught the name aright: "Mrs. McFee . . ."

"Mrs. Folliott McFee," Liane supplied with an accent on the Folliott that supplemented something to this sense: 'Surely you must know that magic name!'

All the same, Lanyard didn't.

"Folly for short," laughed Mrs. McFee—"Folly to my friends." Then she gave a small make-believe shriek because the sable robe was being lifted from her shoulders by the gentleman of the carven coun-

tenance. "Peter Pagan! how you startled me . . . You know Peter Pagan, of course, Mr. Lanyard: everybody does."

"Business of initiating you to the inner circle of certified somebodies, Mr. Lanyard," quoth Mr. Pagan solemnly, shaking hands, and leaving Lanyard with a feeling that no man had a right to look like that if he couldn't extemporize more tellingly.

But Liane had dropped a hand upon his sleeve and was drawing him aside to be made known to the Sultan of Loot.

"Mr. Morphew: Mr. Lanyard . . . You must become good friends, you two who are both such good friends of mine."

This impressive figure of the immobile and livid face and the hooded eyes, this Mr. Hugh Morphew, met Lanyard with a manner subtly allusive beneath a show of non-committal courtesy. His smile was grave, reticent and fugitive, a solitary cat's-paw flaying the surface of plumbless deeps; his few words were carefully chosen and cast in polished periods by an orotund voice: he was honoured to make the acquaintance of Mr. Lanyard and hoped that he, as a friend of Mademoiselle Delorme, would be so very good as to become one of their number for the remainder of the evening . . . But in the cast of his eye, the clasp of his hand, in an undertone his accents had as he pronounced these perfunctory phrases, there was meaning intended to be seized by Lanyard only, and which the latter interpreted much to this effect: 'We have been waiting a long time for this meeting, you and I. But patience:

all in good time we will come to understand each other perfectly.' . . .

To this finesse Lanyard returned no acknowledgement of any sort. Indeed, he contrived to appear unconscious of it, to interpose an amiably modest manner between the scrutiny of those inquisitive but illegible eyes and a nature anything but easy to impress. He had lived so long in this world, in the course of a busy life had had so much to do with pretentiousness, that secretly, and the innuendoes of Liane Delorme to the contrary notwithstanding, he inclined to suspect Mr. Morphew of being a pompous fraud, a character of the utmost commonplaceness skulking behind the consequential false front of a jerry-built personality. He might be mistaken; but for the present the best he was disposed to grant Mr. Morphew was suspended judgement.

Moreover, at the moment, Folly McFee was demanding his attention on behalf of one Mr. Mallison, another whom Lanyard remembered having noticed at the Ritz.

This final introduction was transacted without casualties but without eliciting crowds of ecstasy from either party. Mr. Mallison, indeed, was unaffectedly off-hand in his attitude, he didn't care a damn who knew that, to him, Mr. Lanyard was an interloper, an upstart, nobody in particular. A gesture for which Lanyard was grateful since it enabled him to reciprocate the sentiment that shaped it without feeling remiss in the matter of everyday urbanity.

Tall and gracefully made, Mr. Mallison aired eve-

ning clothes and hair of a lustre seldom to be observed this side of the cinema screen. His speech had the tune of the educated English, or something nearly resembling it, his manners were silky and sulky, he practised a furtive smile down his nose as if he knew something but wouldn't tell, he had mastered a killing trick or two of the eyes for use in talking to women. And when it transpired, on the word of Folly McFee, that Mally tango'd quite too divinely, one felt that one needed to know no more. . . . A person of importance, if you asked Lanyard, solely as he might upon occasion shine with incandescence borrowed from the genius of Mr. Morphew, upon whom Mallison seemed assiduous to fawn in season and out.

Having offered the apology for his intrusion which custom prescribed and accepted the equally conventional assurance that all hands were ravished to have the privilege of welcoming one so well sponsored, Lanyard settled down to use his wits, as Liane had recommended, and find out for himself what this party was all about; if, indeed, it was 'about' anything more unusual than mankind's native predisposition to make light of whatever laws there be.

Certainly, if its members had foregathered at the Clique Club for any purpose other than the desire to drink forbidden wine upon premises of unholy repute, it wasn't at first blush apparent. Nobody was hungry, every soul present having sat through a supper elsewhere and earlier. On the other hand, everybody was famously thirsty with the exception of Mr. Morphew, who was alleged never to drink, and Lanyard who,

having sampled it, didn't frightfully care for the Clique cellar. But all of a sudden Folly McFee, in whom artificial exhilaration was mounting apace, announced that she craved sure-enough excitement. Whereupon at a sign from Morphew the cloth was whisked away and the green baize of a card-table disclosed; whose top manipulation of a hidden catch reversed, bringing to light a small layout for roulette, complete but for chips and the metal wheel to fit in the bowl. These being supplied by Theodore, Mr. Morphew announced that he would stand the first trick as banker and croupier in one, and that white chips would cost one dollar apiece and the sky would be the limit; Mrs. McFee produced an impressive roll of bills from a jewelled mesh-bag and bought chips with a free hand; while Liane Delorme, Mallison, and Pagan purchased more conservatively but still eagerly.

But Lanyard, when Morphew's heavy-lidded eyes turned his way, shook his head: "Thanks; but if you don't mind I'll just look on."

"O Mr. Lanyard!" Folly McFee remonstrated—"and you look like such a good sport."

"You see how deceitful I am," Lanyard pointed out. "Let this be a lesson to Folly, not to trust appearances."

"But really, my friend!" Liane observed reproachfully—"you are no longer the man you were."

"I have always made it a rule not to gamble without money in pocket."

"But I will let you have any amount you want."

"You are too good, Liane. Another rule I have all

my life observed is never to gamble with borrowed money."

"Your credit is good, Mr. Lanyard," Morpew tersely put in.

"Rule Number Three: Never play on credit . . . I am deeply sensible of your courtesy, Mr. Morpew, but really I will be most grateful if you will permit me to sit by and look on merely. The novelty of seeing myself in such a rôle at a roulette table will be compensation enough for the self-denial."

"As you prefer . . ." Morpew politely gave in. But before long he made occasion to exchange with Liane a look clouded with meaning, which Lanyard wasn't supposed to see and which, so far as anybody else knew, he didn't, who was busy just then refilling Folly McFee's glass and making amused response to the coquetry with which the flushed and laughing face turned up to his was instinct.

All the same, Lanyard wasn't missing much that went on, Life had too well trained his faculties to overlook nothing that fell within their range and to be wary of dismissing as necessarily negligible the most minor and incidental details of any affair. He was beginning now to experience glimmerings, to perceive that this curious post-midnight party was 'about' something after all. Even before intercepting that mute consultation of eyes he had felt tolerably satisfied that a community of interests existed between at least three of those present, that Liane, Morpew and Pagan were playing prearranged parts in complete mutual sympathy. It was just possible that Mallison, too, was

privity to their confidence; but one rather doubted that, Mallison impressed one as more likely to prove a tool, a pawn, a wage-loyal henchman, than a peer of this interesting confederation.

The arguments he had adduced in his endeavour to make Eve understand that he was not a man of the sort she ought to marry began to seem inspired. Liane had never brought him here simply to gratify a vagrant whim. Neither had her half-veiled hints been idly uttered, concerning those nameless acquaintances of hers who were taking such a profound if gratuitous interest in Lanyard, and the one whom she most wanted him to meet, either Pagan or Morpew unquestionably, and who was "quite a social power . . . in a quiet way." Because the woman was well-disposed, for old sake's sake she had chosen to warn him, if in her own oblique fashion, to be on his guard with those two in whose minds, Lanyard hadn't any manner of doubt, the project for some time had been forming of inveigling him into some shady sort of association with them, for purposes of their own in the last degree questionable.

Undoubtedly they had taken a good deal of pains to inform themselves as to Lanyard's circumstances. How they expected to be repaid for their trouble remained for him to find out. Hardly out of his pocket; knowing as much as Liane had revealed, they probably knew more, even that the débâcle of his unregenerate days had left him without resources other than the half-pay attaching to an extended leave of absence from the British Secret Service, and that the not inconsiderable cost of squiring about New York a woman of

fashion had brought him to a pass where he might no longer refuse to face the prospect of being unable to pursue that sweet association for sheer inability to finance it—he who had been accustomed to waste money away as freely as in more spacious times he had been wont to appropriate it! A plight the more painful in that it was one he couldn't possibly confess to the woman he loved. He had gone tonight as far in that direction as pride would let him. . . .

Since, then, it was manifestly not pence they wanted of him, this precious pair, this Morpew and this Pagan, it followed that they wanted something less tangible but probably in the upshot more profitable, something which they might have found themselves in a position to require of him if he could have been induced to play roulette on credit and had lost—as he made no doubt he would have lost. Setting aside all question of the honesty of the wheel which Morpew's huge hands were manipulating with notable deftness, the observation and experience of this inveterate gambler of other days had convinced Lanyard that luck seldom or never favours him to whom its smile is a matter of life or death.

Not that he conceived the game to have been planned with any idea of inducing him to play and lose, his attendance had come about too fortuitously. To believe that was to believe Liane had foreseen that he would be marching down Fifth avenue at half an hour after midnight and had deliberately arranged to have her cab skid and land her on the kerb a dozen paces ahead of him.

No: by every sign acceptable to a fairly sophisticated intelligence, tonight's affair had been plotted for the sole if highly problematic benefit of Mrs. Folliott McFee. Not in all likelihood for the purpose of fleecing her at a friendly little game, though she was punting with feverish imprudence, broadcasting her bets and losing very considerable sums without perceptible care. Lanyard was prepared to credit Messrs. Morphew and Pagan with capacity for any degree of knavery; but their evident affluence and their association with Liane Delorme inclined him to believe that they were in this instance up to some mischief at least a cut above crooked gambling. Liane, thorough-paced rip that she was, had in the course of a highly chromatic career feathered her nest too warmly to be reduced to the rôle of tout to a brace of common sharpers.

What, then, could their purpose be with this engaging and indiscreet young person? If only one knew a little more about Mrs. Folliott McFee it might be easier to guess.

In the absence of such specific information, a study of her as she was tonight would do no harm, might quite possibly prove rewarding.

Indisputably a fascinating creature. Divested of her sables, disclosed partially in but largely out of a flimsy piece of impudence which the cynical Rue de la Paix had fashioned to serve as an evening gown, she cut a figure the most sprightly and sightly heart could wish: an animated miniature of extreme loveliness, abandoning herself to the spirit of play with the heedless vivacity of a charming child; drinking a bit more

than she should, perhaps, while she watched her stakes unfailingly fall to the lot of the croupier's rake, but plaguing Mallison with a lightly malicious wit that struck him speechless and left him more than ever sulky, bartering pungent banter with Mr. Peter Pagan, cheeking the taciturn Morpew till he smiled perforce his rare begrudged smiles, and never for an instant forgetting that Lanyard was likewise an unattached and personable male; and all with a delicate air that robbed her most flagrant audacities of any suggestion of poor taste and made her seem strangely out of place in that ring of hard and selfish faces, in that overheated private room of an establishment whose every purpose was illicit, in that demoralizing atmosphere drenched with perfume of wine and scent of perfumed flesh . . . Strangely out of place, appealingly helpless for all her bravado: a child among thieves and worse . . .

But it were a thankless job to waste solicitude upon her: if Folly couldn't take care of herself, nothing was more certain than that the way to earn her abiding dislike was to try to take care of her. In New York, as every elsewhere in the haunts of men of means beyond their needs or native ability to spend with good grace, no novelty at all inheres in the spectacle of such flighty young women, amusement-mad and gifted with too much freedom from responsibility, going devious ways with dubious guides. And the worst of it is, as a general rule it's nobody's business but their own.

Now in course of time, when a waiter entered with yet another cooler wherein two more bottles were luxuriously cuddled in cracked ice, the open door admitted

stimulating strains of the orchestra downstairs; and forthwith Folly McFee concluded she'd had enough of roulette, at least temporarily.

"Perfectly damn' rotten luck!" she declared, pushing back her chair and jumping up. "I'm for a dance, maybe that will change it. Who wants to take me down for this tango? Mally——?"

"You can't have Mally," Liane Delorme informed her with serene decision. "You've had him all evening at the Ritz. It's my turn now. Take Peter Pagan: he's a better match for you, dear."

"Pick on somebody your own size," Pagan paraphrased, leaving his place with an alacrity that forestalled Lanyard's intended response to the glint of invitation in the eyes which Folly promptly had turned his way. "If you refuse me, Folly, you doom me to dance with Liane; and that always makes me feel like an enterprising tug waltzing the Mauretania round the North River."

Liane retorted with one of those characterizations so dear to the Parisian heart, a deadly insult but absolutely meaningless when rendered into English; and Pagan proved a certain lack of finish in his cosmopolitan education by merely looking blank as he mentally translated her remarks. After which he bowed cheerfully to the traducer of his lineage and ambled off with Folly's hand under his arm; while Liane rose and playfully tweaked Mallison out of his chair by an ear, to his indignation, for he had been winning and naturally wanted to go on playing as long as his luck lasted.

"It isn't that I really want to dance," she coolly explained to Morphew and Lanyard as she haled Mal-lison to the door, "but simply to give you two time to get acquainted . . ."

Morphew lumbered heavily after her and set the spring-lock by way of providing against interruption. "Intelligent woman, Liane," he approved, unsmiling, as he returned to his chair.

"As to that, monsieur, one is entirely of your mind."

Lanyard helped himself to a cigarette and looked civilly receptive under the weight of Morphew's direct and thoughtful stare.

"Odd," that one considered, "we never happened to meet before this, Mr. Lanyard."

"Think so?"

"Noticed you about town often enough."

"But does not the fact that our paths have sometimes crossed prove we travel widely different courses?"

"I'm not so sure . . ."

"Not——?" Lanyard murmured, lifting the brows of polite surprise.

"I've got a notion, if the whole truth were known, you and I would find we were travelling in much the same direction . . . in the dark."

"Monsieur does much travelling in the dark?"

"Guess you know what I mean," Morphew's gravity was lightened by a twinkle of genial cunning. "When I say 'in the dark,' I mean, of course, the side of our lives we like to keep covered up."

"This is most interesting," Lanyard protested with animation. "You are going to tell me about that side of your life which you like to keep covered up?"

"No fear." The twinkle broadened into a grin. "Guess I'll let you guess at that, same as I have to guess at yours."

"I hope very truly monsieur does not so waste his time. I can assure him, if his guess-work were to flood with light every nook and byway of my life, what he would see would not entertain him."

The lines running from Morphew's nostrils to the corners of his mouth took on a sardonic set. "I doubt that, Mr. Lanyard."

"My ways of life are very quiet."

"I believe you. Still, I doubt I'd be bored."

"Possibly not," Lanyard conceded. "One is able to judge only by what one has seen of you in public, monsieur; which leads one to believe your interests centre by choice in light-hearted young people, not sober-sided, steady-paced elderlies like myself."

"Oh! as to that, I take folks as I find them," Morphew alleged. "And I find 'em all interesting, one way or another. Now yourself . . ."

"But I do assure you I am not at all interesting."

"Point of view," Morphew contended. "I'll say you've had an interesting life."

Lanyard gave a good-natured shrug. "After all, it is the only life I have . . . But monsieur, I am sure"—his manner grew moderately pointed—"would find it tiresome."

"I don't," Morphew bluntly countered.

"Then I am honoured—I presume—to learn you have concerned yourself in respect of my modest self."

"I know a lot about you," Morphew admitted—"past and present."

"Yet you tell me you think my present mode of life intriguing!"

"Intensely."

Lanyard laughed. "Monsieur will pardon my suggesting that his sources of information, however busy, are unreliable if they have led him to believe my small affairs worthy of his attention."

"Point of view again." Morphew dismissed argument with a flirt of a massive hand. "Be that as it may: I've been anxious to meet you to ask you to help me answer a certain question."

"Indeed?"

"Perhaps it would be more nearly right to call it a problem in psychology."

"I am all attention."

"It's like this . . ." Morphew had resumed his customary guise of profound solemnity. "What I want your expert opinion on, Mr. Lanyard, is the question of whether it's possible for a man . . . say he's a friend I'm taking a personal interest in . . . a man who built up a pretty warm criminal reputation for himself, when he was younger, and then hit the sawdust trail apparently for keeps . . . Whether it's possible for such a man to keep going straight in the face of every possible incentive to set up shop again as a master crook."

"Such incentives as——?" Lanyard enquired with every symptom of intelligent interest in a hypothetical instance.

"Well! let's suppose this man I've got in mind, this friend of mine, has fallen for a woman who's got

everything, social position, any amount of coin, all that sort of thing. Say she's in love with him, too, and they want to get married. But my friend is broke, or next thing to it; and he's got a touchy sense of honour—sometimes reformed crooks have, you know—so he can't marry the woman, because that would make him look like a fortune-hunter if she ever found out he hadn't a red cent; and he can't let on to her he's stoney, because then she'd insist on marrying him to support him, and he'd feel like a yellow pup; and he can't do a quiet fade-out, either, because then she'd think he hadn't been on the level with her, and that would break her heart. That leaves him where? He's got to have coin to go on with, and the only way to get it is for him to remember some of the things he's been trying to forget. He's living in a city where there's more money and loot lying round loose to be picked up for the taking than any place else in the world, and where police protection against burglary and highway robbery is a positive joke, where a good fat safe is cracked or a hold-up pulled off every other day, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred the crook's never caught. So you see our friend has just what I said he had, every temptation to come back strong in the house-breaking line, and practically nothing to fear—except maybe that the woman he's crazy about will tumble sometime to how he's getting his dough. And that's the problem that's been puzzling me, Mr. Lanyard: What's our friend going to do? . . . What would *you* do?"

Lanyard thoughtfully ground out the fire of his cigarette in an ash-tray and got up. "I imagine," he

said quietly, "your anonymous friend would do precisely what I mean to do, Mr. Morphew. He would get well weary of tedious beating about the bush, but at the same time would remind himself that the obligations which devolve upon a guest constrain him to overlook, for the present, a piece of damnable impertinence. He would for that reason take his hat and coat and stick—as you see me taking mine—and finally his departure—as I shall take mine, monsieur, pausing only to advise you . . ."

Lanyard stood over Morphew, plunging a stare ugly with anger into the apathetic and unreadable eyes of his host. "At the first sign, Mr. Morphew," he said, "of any disposition on your part to meddle further in my affairs, either in person or through an agent, I will seek you out, wherever you may try to hide, and break this stick, or a stouter one, over your contemptible back. Be advised: hands off!"

He waited an instant to hear what Morphew might have to say to this defiance; but since the man said nothing, made no sign of any sort, his huge body betrayed his mind by not so much as the stir of a finger or the wince of an eye, Lanyard at length wheeled on a heel and went to the door. Only then, as his hand closed on the knob, Morphew spoke, employing the same conversational tone he had all along employed.

"One moment, Mr. Lanyard. It may interest you to know I own this joint. When I got up to shut that door a while ago, I gave Theodore the high-sign. Ever since then four of our waiters, the toughest

rough-necks on the pay-roll, have been stationed in the hall. If you try to leave without my say so, you'll be badly beaten up; and if you try any rough stuff in here, my finger's on the push-button that will call them in . . . I am not done talking with you yet, my friend. So now, if you'll attend to me and keep your temper in hand, I'll show you just where you stand."

He rested, watching Lanyard with no perceptible emotion in his bleak, pale eyes; and when, after momentary consideration, Lanyard turned back from the door, the man resumed with the same minatory composure, leaning forward with an arm on the table and rapping out his points with a thick forefinger.

"Whether you've gone back to thieving or not, Lanyard, I don't know yet. I guess you have. If you haven't, you've thought of doing so. Whether or not, you've got to come to me. I've got you"—Morphew turned his hand palm up and closed the fingers slowly into a tremendous fist—"there! You can marry your Mrs. de Montalais as soon as you like, but only with my consent; and you won't get that for nothing. If you're back at your old game, you'll come across to me, fifty-fifty. If you marry the woman for her money, my share will be half of all you squeeze out of her."

"And"—Lanyard's fingers were itching to bury themselves in that fat throat and shake the beast till he cried for mercy—"and if I refuse?"

"I'll advertise you to all New York—or anywhere else you try to live with your wife—as the Lone Wolf back at his old dodges. I'll prove you committed

every burglary of any size this Town has known in the last three months; and if that isn't enough, I'll plant others on you. You'll come across to me, my dear sir, or go up the River for life."

"Such being the case," said Lanyard, shortening his grip on his stick, "I think I would as willingly go up for manslaughter—if killing a blackmailer comes under that head."

As he spoke the door was thrown open, a vast din of angry and excited voices seethed up from below, and Theodore appeared on the threshold, chattering, wringing his talons in antic terror.

"Monsieur!" he stuttered between clashing teeth—"Monsieur Morphew! The police! A raid! A raid!"

IV

WITH an incoherent bellow of rage and astonishment Morphew reared up out of his chair, overturning it. But that was all: instantaneously something like a paralysis of consternation laid hold of him, so that he stood with huge hands fluttering feebly and knees quaking under his great weight, the light dimming behind the bleached flesh of his face, jaw sagging, stunned eyes seeking the doorway.

Through this last, a froth of noise upon the uproar from below, came sounds of scuffling and voices angry and expostulant. In the corridor a confused movement became visible, a knot of figures fell apart, Liane Delorme broke through and, ghastly with pallor beneath her war-paint, strode breathlessly into the room, one strong sweep of a perfectly modelled arm brushing aside the gibbering Theodore.

Mallison followed her closely, like a fearful child tagging at its mother's skirts, with the slinking tread and something of the witless look of a cowed animal peering through the sleek surface of his comeliness. And that this look little belied his state of mind was shown by the nervous shy he gave when Lanyard, satisfied there was nothing to be gained by more delay, made for the door.

The corridor was choked with people, flustered waiters mixed in with guests whom the alarm had routed

out of the other private rooms, all aimlessly milling about and questioning one another with vacant eyes and babbling tongues. Nobody offered to stay Lanyard, on the other hand nobody offered to get out of his way. Pagan passed him, plying busy elbows, his habitual leer erased. Of Mrs. McFee one saw nothing.

Half-way to the head of the staircase Lanyard found the jam on the narrow landing too dense to be penetrated other than by main strength and ill will; and, crowded against the banisters, waited for some general movement that might permit him to proceed.

Looking down over the handrail, he commanded a view of the first landing, the stage of a more lively scene, as guests and employees stampeding for the stairs were checked, hustled, and bullyragged by a squad of police, readily to be picked out by their flat-topped blue caps, and by a number of plain-clothes men, quite as conspicuously badged by those weather-worn derbies lacking which self-respecting police detectives consider themselves no sportsmen in their attitude toward lawbreakers.

Hectoring cries of authority, plain profanity of an unimaginative citizenry, and yammering of hysterical women manufactured a clamour that drowned out all lesser noises till somebody near Lanyard used stentorian lungs to suggest the roof as a possible way of escape; upon which advice the whole body of people surged toward the third flight of stairs.

In that moment, while clinging to the banister-rail to keep from being swept along, Lanyard heard his name shrilled in a pathetic voice, and saw Mrs. McFee

struggling in the rush, the violet eyes darkly dilate with dismay, the mouth of a child tremulous with appeal. Immediately he threw himself toward her. Tripped and jostled till her strength began to fail, his arms alone saved the young woman from going down under those panic feet. Then putting his shoulders to the press, he dragged her out of the worst of it and into the semi-shelter of a jog in the wall, in front of which he planted himself as a shield.

"Now we're all right," he cheerfully said. "Take it easy, and don't worry."

"But I can't help worrying!" the small person objected, clutching the lapels of his dress coat with importunate hands. "How can I, if I'm going to be arrested and put in jail and brought up in a police court with all these awful people? The shame of it! the disgrace!"

"If you'll trust to me," Lanyard suggested, "I think I can promise you none of those calamities will happen."

"But how can you——?"

"I'm sure I know a way . . ."

As he spoke, with no warning whatsoever the house from cellar to roof was drenched with darkness absolute.

This thing befell with fine dramatic force. Where there had been deafening hubbub and confusion to confound the readiest, a lull of a long moment succeeded, during which every voice was hushed and nobody stirred. In this breathing-spell Lanyard found time to surmise what had happened: that some creature of

Morphew's, acting possibly on inspiration but more probably in conformance with a plan preconcerted against such emergency, had disconnected the master-switch of the electric lighting system. . . . But Folly McFee whimpered in new fright and caught him closer to her; and in another breath the turmoil revived in redoubled volume.

Lanyard lifted his hands to the woman's and gently disengaged them.

"There, Mrs. McFee! don't be alarmed. They've simply shut off the lights to give the people the police are after a chance to escape. If you will calm yourself and have a bit of faith in me, I'll get you out of this in a jiffy, and no harm done."

"But my wrap! I can't go without my wrap, I'd catch my death! And my handbag, too—I left it on the table——!"

"I'll find them for you; it won't delay us a minute."

Lanyard swept the darkness roundabout with an extended hand, which encountered nothing; then, satisfied that the landing was now practically deserted, drew the woman out of her corner and coolly wound an arm round her.

"I'll be better able to avoid losing you, this way," he explained. "Hope you don't mind."

"No-o," said the small voice—"I think—I believe I rather like it."

For all that unmitigated mirk Lanyard experienced no difficulty in finding the way back to the right door.

"Hello?" he called, pausing on its threshold. "I've

got Mrs. McFee here, safe and sound. Somebody make a light: I noticed candles on the mantlepiece . . ."

Nothing answered him. But this he had discounted. Releasing the woman and bidding her stop where she was, he struck a match whose flare revealed a room deserted.

Folly McFee gave a gasp of astonishment: "Where are they?"

"In sound American slanguage," Lanyard replied, crossing to the fireplace and applying the flame to the wicks of moulded and tinted candles which decorated its mantel—"our friends have flown the coop. You see, Morphew just now told me he is the proprietor of these premises; so I'm inclined to suspect the lights were put out to permit him to make a clean getaway. . . . But here's your wrap." He draped the sable robe round the woman's shoulders. "And your bag," he added, finding the same where Folly had left it.

"But I don't understand," she protested, lifting a bewildered small face to the light.

"I never imagined you would, Mrs. McFee," Lanyard laughed, catching up one of the candlesticks and turning to the door. "If you had understood, I fancy, you would never have come here tonight—or any night—that is, unless it's a fad of yours to live up to your nickname. . . ."

The words failed on his lips as he pulled up, finding the door blocked by a long, lanky shape of humanity that lounged with one lazy shoulder against the frame; the derby of tradition on the back of his head, hands buried in the pockets of an unbuttoned overcoat—one

of them, Lanyard hadn't any doubt whatever, holding an automatic pistol ready.

"The devil!" he involuntarily exclaimed.

"Devil yourself, Monseer Lanyard," a nasal drawl retorted. "Funny! I was thinking only a day or so ago, it was about time for you and me to be bumping into each other again. And now, lo and behold you!"

"It can't be!" Lanyard incredulously cried, stepping nearer and holding his candle high.

"Wrong again: it can," drawled the humorous voice—"it is!"

Candlelight ruddled the lineaments of a North American Indian in the skin of a paleface: narrowed eyes beneath a lofty brow, a thin nose with a prominent bridge, lantern jaws and high cheek-bones, a wide slit of a firm-lipped mouth.

"Crane!" Lanyard cried in unfeigned pleasure.

"Never forget anything, do you?" Mr. Crane complained in mock bitterness. "Here I was counting on being able to put something over on you, because you hadn't seen me for five or six years—Nineteen-Seventeen, wasn't it?—and you'd ought've forgotten my map entirely . . . Swell chance!"

He surrendered to Lanyard's friendly grasp a bony hand of tremendous strength. "Well!" he grouched on: "I guess here's where I miss another opportunity to put you out of harm's way—in the hoosegow—because you wouldn't be so gosh-awful glad to see me if you'd been doing anything real naughty."

"My dear man!" Lanyard informed him: "if every American detective discovered even a tenth of your de-

ductive intelligence, New York's crime wave wouldn't be a ripple. . . . That aside, I'm more glad to see you than I can tell."

"I bet you are," Crane assented with ironic intent. "And I'll risk another safe bet, too: The sooner you see the last of me for tonight, the gladder you'll be."

"Why waste time trying to deceive you? I don't deny it."

"Then I reckon it'll make you and your lady happy if I fix it up pronto for you to get away without being mugged and finger-printed and all? Well: I'm a sworn servant of the law, and by all accounts you're a desperate bad lot; but come along . . . Only you got to promise you wont tell on me."

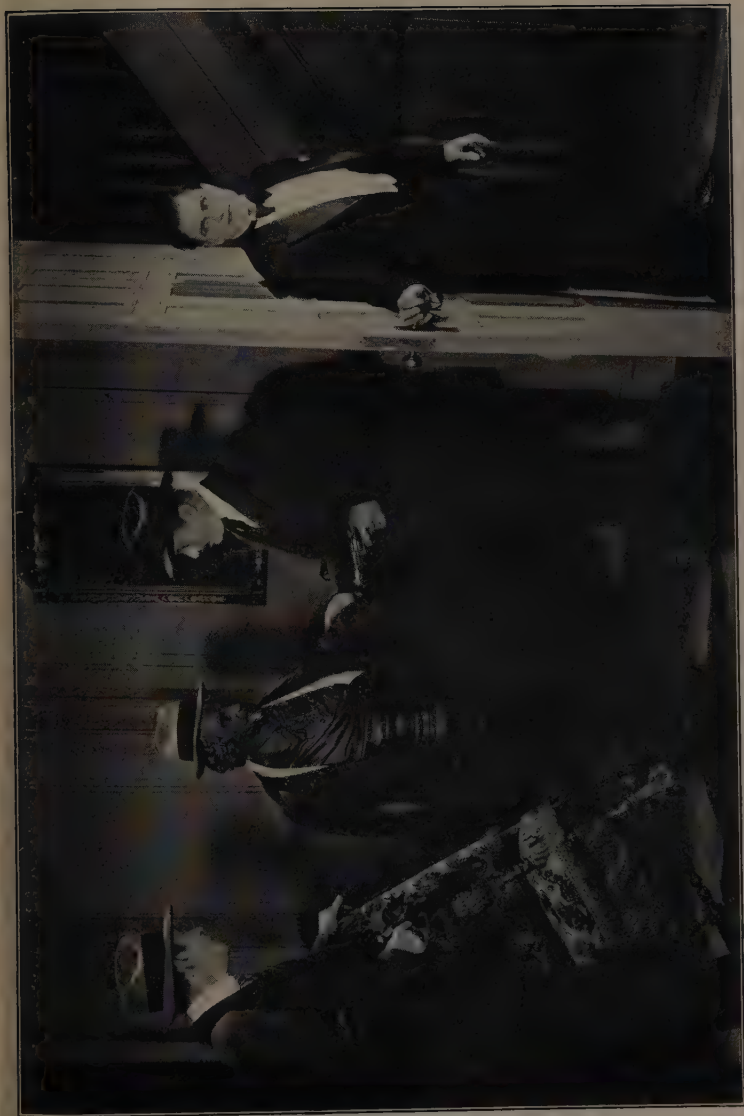
Crane sighed and straightened up, only to have Lanyard drop a detaining hand on his arm.

"A moment, my friend, by your leave. My personal gratitude I hope to prove when you are less occupied. But Mrs. McFee, too, would like to thank you. . . . Permit me, Mrs. McFee: Mr. Crane . . ."

"Mrs. Folliott McFee?" Crane quickly queried, with a glint of interest, and engulfed in his grasp her absurdly insignificant hand. "How do you do, ma'm? Pleased to meet you."

"It's awfully sweet of you," Folly replied with trusting eyes and that hint—no more—of an infantile lisp which she had found so serviceable in dealing with certain types of men. "I'm sure I'd be frightened silly if it wasn't for you and Mr. Lanyard."

"Nothing for you to be scared about," Crane reassured her. "It's the outfit runs this joint we're after



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tonight, not the general public, that great body"—his tone took on the authentic twang of a public orator—"of simple-minded, plain-living, law-deriding hooch hounds that forms the sturdy backbone of this glorious nation. . . . Listen to 'em yap!" He grinned broadly, cocking an appreciative ear to the racket. "No, ma'm: even if you and Monseer Lanyard hadn't run into me, the worst that could happen to you would be to have your names and addresses taken, so's you could be called as witnesses in case we caught somebody. Which," Crane added with conviction, "I don't much think we will, not tonight, not since they put the lights out on us. That's a brand new dodge, and a hot one. After this gets out, I reckon we'll have to carry our own lighting-plant along with us for night work, like in the movies."

He was piloting Mrs. McFee down the corridor while thus discoursing, in the wake of Lanyard's candle. Now, at the head of the stairs, he nodded to a patrolman stationed there, and the three were permitted to descend.

The raiding party had by this time found other candles and brought a few electric torches into play, by whose meagre illumination the business of winnowing out the goats from the sheep was proceeding in the rooms which had been reserved for dancing. But of this Lanyard and Folly McFee caught only the barest of glimpses in passing; for Crane, obviously in haste to discharge his friendly duty and be rid of them, passed them with all possible expedition through the house. At the front door he nevertheless held them for a moment.

"There's more or less a mob outside," he stated; "but I guess you won't have much trouble finding a taxi. That is, unless Mrs. McFee came in her own car . . ." But it transpired that Folly hadn't. "Then I guess it's good night folks! Only, I'd like one word with you first, Lanyard, if Mrs. McFee won't mind . . ."

Drawing Lanyard aside, Crane dropped his voice: "Still with the B. S. S.? Doing anything special over here?"

"No: in fact, nothing. On leave of absence."

"I see. Where you stopping?" Crane noted the street number on the back of an envelope. "I'll look you up as soon's I get time. Like to have a chin about this and that."

"Do, my friend; and don't delay too long."

Passed by Crane through the police lines but pursued by jeers and cat-calls of the crowd which had collected, Lanyard and Folly hurried round the corner into Sixth avenue, and there by good fortune picked up a cab almost at once. This they would hardly have needed but for the drizzle, which had set in again: Folly McFee, it appeared, lived in the lower Fifties, just east of Park avenue. Learning which, Lanyard hushed a sigh of content: the shorter the drive, the better. This latter part of his evening had exhilarated him not at all; and though the woman at his side was charming enough in her way, nothing would please him more than to see the last of her and be free to trot home to his dreams of Eve. In fact, he found himself surprisingly sleepy, considering the hour, which,

according to a street clock on Fifth Avenue, still lacked a few minutes of two: so swift had been the transaction of events since his meeting with Liane Delorme.

A plaintive sigh from the other corner of the seat recalled him.

"You are tired, madame?" he enquired of the small figure huddled in that magnificent panoply of fur.

Passing lights fitfully revealed a petulant face to match Folly's tone: "More disgusted than tired. I'm so awfully grateful, and you've been such a perfect brick to me, Mr. Lanyard, it makes me sick to have you think me a little fool."

"But I assure you, I do not think anything of the sort."

"You forget what you said, back there in the Clique Club, about it's being a fad of mine to live up to my name."

"That would be unforgiveable were it open to the construction you put on it, madame. What I said was——"

"I know perfectly well what you said, at least what you meant: that I ought to have known better than to be there at all. But I don't see why."

"I should like very much to tell you, if I might without seeming to presume . . ."

"But I want you to tell me, Mr. Lanyard; I don't want to do things that make people think it's a fad of mine—"

"Surely you will be generous enough to forget those stupid words. Otherwise I shall never forgive myself."

"I will . . . on one condition." A suggestion of the impish spirit of an hour ago revived in Folly's smile. "And that is, that you explain what you meant—right away."

"But it is so late, madame; and already we are arrived."

The cab was in fact halting in front of one of those interesting bijou residences into which modern architectural ingenuity has, in the more fashionable quarters of New York, remodelled so many of the brownstone and brick abominations of decades dead and gone.

"Late?" Folly McFee expostulated, dilating eyes of naïve perplexity. "Why, it's only two—the shank of the evening! Plenty of time to come in and have a drink and a cigarette and tell me how to save myself from the pitfalls of life in a great city."

And Lanyard, helping the woman to alight, with a bow and a smile covered yet another sigh of sentimental desolation. There was no refusal possible without rudeness . . .

By the time he had paid off the taxi Folly had used a latch-key, and was unfastening the throat of her wrap in the little entrance-hall.

"Do leave your coat and hat here, Mr. Lanyard—and make believe you're not bored to tears with the prospect of spending half an hour alone with a pretty woman who thinks you're rather nice."

"You do me injustice," he gravely returned. "This pensive silence you misconstrue is solely due to wonder what your family will think . . ."

"The Saints be praised!" cried Folly McFee, rolling up devout eyes—"I haven't a suspicion of family, more than a maiden aunt who insists on living with me for the looks of the thing. But if it's information you're fishing for, it's only fair to tell you I'm a lone, lorn widdy woman, and have been for years. So you needn't be hoping for a jealous husband to pop in unexpectedly and save you from my wiles."

She danced to the back of the hall, a bewitching smile bidding him follow.

The room was a study and lounge in which easy chairs faced the embers of an open fire and windows heavily draped contributed to a cosy and informal atmosphere.

Here, measurably less bored than he thought he ought to be, Laynard accepted a cigarette and a high-ball compounded with such Scotch as he had not tasted since leaving England, and made himself comfortable on one side of the fireplace while on the other Folly curled herself up in an interesting pose with feet beneath her.

"And now," she announced with a speciously demure look—"I'm waiting to be told why I'm aptly nicknamed."

Smiling, Laynard put his glass aside. "Perhaps one reason is because you recklessly invite into your house at ungodly hours a man about whom you know nothing whatever."

"I know enough from the way you've behaved to-night. Besides, anything I want to know about you I can find out from Liane any time I care to ask."

Folly made a provoking face. "You'll have to do better than that!"

Lanyard shrugged. "I see there's no fobbing you off . . . Is it permitted to be plain-spoken?"

"Please. Even if it hurts, I'm sure I'll find it refreshing . . ." With malice Folly amended: "coming from a man." She pursued with all the solemnity of a sagacious infant: "You know, Mr. Lanyard, it's all tosh, this effort you men are forever making to persuade the world you're the straight-forward sex. Maybe you are among yourselves, but with women—!"

Her eyes called Heaven to witness to the subtlety of masculine methods with women.

"I agree entirely, madame. But do you claim more for your own sex?"

"Oh! there's never any doubt about a woman's mind. She may not always say what she means, sometimes she doesn't just know how, but one always knows what she means."

"One always knows she means business . . ."

"Precisely." Folly giggled joyously. "You know, Mr. Lanyard, you're too delightful. I'm afraid you're a dangerous man."

Lanyard bowed his appreciation of this flattery. "You begin to believe, perhaps, you may have been a trifle injudicious in asking me in . . ."

The young woman agitated a dissentient head till its bobbed brassy tresses fluffed out like an aureole.

"Not the least bit!" she declared. "You could be dangerous and not half try; but so long as you persist

in being a gentleman, why should I fear? Here am I using all my girlish arts to make you flirt—and all you can think of is how quickly you can read me the lecture I need and escape. Ain't that the truth?" She relished in elfin mischief Lanyard's momentary loss of countenance, then abruptly made a prim mouth, and sat with modest eyes downcast to folded hands. "Well!" she sighed: "go on . . ."

"No," Lanyard demurred; "I don't think I shall, if you don't mind. I begin to see my mistake: you can very well be trusted to take care of yourself."

"But if I insist? It isn't good manners to start something without finishing it."

"A man might better rush down a steep place into the sea than take a dare to advise any woman . . . But evidently I may as well resign myself to being thrown out instead of taking my leave in orderly fashion."

"Anything, so long as you get away some time soon!" Folly lisped, without looking up: "I understand you."

"To begin with, then: You are an extremely attractive young woman."

"Yes, I know. But is this part of the lecture? or have I at last succeeded in rousing you?"

But Lanyard wouldn't be diverted. "And apparently," he persisted, "too well supplied with money to know a real care."

"Simple sloughs of the wretched stuff," Folly frankly admitted.

"That sable coat you wore tonight can't have cost less than twenty thousand dollars."

"How little men know! It cost thirty."

"The jewels you're wearing would ransom a profiteer's wife—"

"Why not? I'm a profiteer's widow."

"Those emeralds alone must be worth a hundred thousand."

"You do know emeralds, don't you, Mr. Lanyard?"

"Altogether, taken as you stand, you'd probably assay a quarter of a million. Yet you complacently riot about town and without a moment's hesitation trust yourself in resorts like the Clique Club, rendezvous of the rarest set of rogues New York can boast—and your host its self-confessed proprietor!"

"Oh! everybody knows Morphy's the King of the Bootleggers; but nobody except Revenue officials considers a bootlegger a criminal nowadays."

"Possibly not. Still, I fancy, society is less kindly disposed toward professional blackmailers, notorious demi-mondaines, and jewel thieves of international ill-fame."

"Mr. Lanyard! you don't mean to say—" Folly McFee sat up and made shocked eyes.

"I am one whose lot it has been to see a vast deal of this world, madame. I give you my word I recognized representatives of all those classes at the Clique tonight."

The woman illustrated a little thrill of delicious dread. "Of course, as to blackmailers, I've nothing to fear—"

"Pardon: but can you be sure? In the absence of any fair excuse for bleeding their victims, blackmailers

have been known to manufacture evidence. And it's always, with them, the open season for high-spirited young women of fortune with a taste for entertaining indiscretions."

The violet eyes widened and darkened. "Mr. Lanyard! you don't mean—you don't think—I

"Tell me this, Mrs. McFee: How did you make the acquaintance of Mr. Morphew?"

"Why! through Madame Delorme—"

"And Liane?"

"Mally introduced us."

"And Mr. Mallison?"

"Oh! I don't know . . . I really don't remember where I met Mally. Somewhere at a dance. He's the perfectest dancer in Town."

"They are, as a rule."

" 'They' ?"

"Permit one more impertinent question: Does Mr. Mallison make love to you?"

"Why, of course! it's the only conversation he knows."

"And you encourage him?"

"Now it's no use your trying to make me believe Mally's a blackmailer. He hasn't got enough brains—or anything else."

"Perhaps not. But others have, with whom he herds. For example, Mr. Morphew."

"Morphy!" Folly laughed the notion to scorn—"the King of the Bootleggers makes too much money, he doesn't need to levy blackmail."

"It may be merely a hobby of his," Lanyard sub-

mitted reasonably; "or perhaps he's keeping his hand in order to have a good trade to fall back on if ever anything happens to upset the Eighteenth Amendment."

"You aren't serious, Mr. Lanyard?"

"Madame: I *know*."

"How can you?"

"Your American courts permit a witness to refuse to answer leading questions on the ground that his testimony might tend to incriminate or degrade."

"You mean Morphy's trying to blackmail you? What a wicked life you must have led!"

"I don't deny that; but rest assured, I admit it only to convince you I am not guessing. You will do well, believe me, madame, to avoid hereafter Mr. Morphew and all his crew."

"Mally and Peter Pagan and Liane Delorme? And they've been such fun! What's the matter with Liane?"

"Madame Delorme," Lanyard said slowly and with meaning, "I have known many years. Her friendship I value highly. I should be very sad to do anything to deserve her enmity."

"You *are* provoking!" Folly declared—"forever tantalizing one with hints. I presume you mean me to understand she's the notorious demi-mondaine you mentioned."

"Has Liane told you nothing about herself?"

"Oh heaps! but—"

"Then I beg you to excuse me from saying anything that might, possibly through my ignorance of the true facts, conflict with her confidences."

"Beast!" said Folly McFee with feeling, and made him a face of pique. "I suppose it's no use trying to pump you about that international jewel thief . . ."

"None whatever, madame."

"Of course, you mean the Lone Wolf."

"But why that one?"

"Peter Pagan was talking about him at the Ritz tonight, told us there was a rumour the Lone Wolf had convalesced from his reformation and was on the loose again, right here in New York."

"I have no doubt," Lanyard agreed with entire tranquillity, "there is such a rumour . . . And now that I have duly functioned in my paternal rôle, my dear young woman"—he rose—"now I have told you all I know—"

"Anybody that believes that—!"

"I fancy you will be relieved if I bid you good night."

"I think you're perfectly damn' horrid," said Folly McFee, rising and extending her hand. "First you spoil my evening, then you run away."

"You will forgive me one spoiled evening, I know, if anything I may have said preserves to you the beauty of your tomorrows,"

"I won't forgive you for running away from me," the young woman promised darkly, holding fast to his hand and unleashing 80 c.p. eyes to do their devastating work. "You can be rather a dear when you choose; but I don't think it's a bit fair of you to rob me of four friends and not replace them with one."

"But I trust very truly—" Lanyard began.

A peremptory buzz of the doorbell interrupted.

V

FOLLY McFEE whipped her hand away with a jerk, her round eyes consulted Lanyard's, in that furtive tone which people seem instinctively to adopt in times of apprehension, irrespective of the possibility of being overheard, "What can that mean?" she demanded—"at this hour of morning! Who can it be?"

"One or more of our fancy friends, undoubtedly," Lanyard replied with comforting absence of agitation—"calling to enquire if you got safely home—with, I'll wager, some transparent excuse for having left you to shift for yourself during the raid."

"But," the woman boggled, with a frown, "I don't want to see them . . . And all the servants are in bed . . ."

"Then I'm afraid there's no way out of it." Lanyard moved toward the hall door as the bell sounded another and more imperative stridulation. "Let me—"

"No," Folly decided, darting ahead—"I'll let them in. But I do wish I didn't have to."

"Then remember," Lanyard enjoined: "better not give them any reason to suspect I have warned you . . ."

"I understand." She paused an instant, nodding

back to him. "I'll do my best. But promise me one thing: you won't leave me alone with them."

He promised, a gay flirt of that fair head thanked him, Folly vanished. And in another moment Lanyard heard her give little cries of elation whose ring was as true as one could wish: "Liane! Peter! how sweet of you both!" And the listener gave a nod of thoughtful approbation.

The dry accents of Mr. Pagan replied: "I told Liane you were all right, but she wouldn't hear of going home without stopping to make sure . . ."

"Oh I'm all right, of course! Mr. Lanyard brought me home. Thanks to him we didn't have the least trouble. But do come in, both of you, and tell him how *you* got out of it."

Liane was heard to consent, stipulating, however, that they would stop only a moment; and the three entered the study to find Lanyard at a wide window in the rear wall, thoughtfully peering out through its tear-blinded panes.

"Ah! ah! my friend," Liane saluted him in lively imitation of the tone she might have used to a child caught in mild mischief; and wagged a forefinger of reproof. "What are you up to there?"

"Trying to make out whether or not it's raining," Lanyard serenely explained, dropping the draperies his hands had parted.

"You might have waited to enquire of us."

"Judging by the state of mind you and Monsieur Pagan were betraying when I saw you last," Lanyard retorted, "it seemed fair to doubt whether you'd pay

much attention to a drop or two of water." He comprehended Pagan in a lightly mocking bow. "You might tell us—we've been no end mystified—"

"I know," Mr. Pagan interrupted brightly. "You want the answer to that historical riddle: Where was Morpheus when the lights went out?"

"Not where he was, monsieur, but where he went—and not alone—and with such amazing expedition."

"We didn't know what to think," Folly declared. "You vanished from that room like tumblers in a pantomime."

"It was very simple," Pagan glibly elucidated: "Everybody seemed to be making for the roof, so we followed the crowd."

"Presuming, of course," Liane amended, "you would, as well."

"You see," commented Lanyard, nodding to Folly, "how simply some things may be explained!" And thereby earned, and enjoyed, a resentful look from Pagan. "And did you actually get away across the roofs?"

"Unhappily, no. Those wretched police were up there, too," said Liane, with disgust. "So we had to go back and line up with the rest and give our pedigrees."

"Monsieur Morpheus, too?" Lanyard's tone was skeptical. "And that so charming Monsieur Mallison?"

"All of us," Pagan snapped in a strangely sour temper. "That's what delayed us."

"Frankly, monsieur, you surprise me."

"How so?"

"Why! if I were in Monsieur Morpew's shoes—"

"You'd rattle," Pagan asserted.

"What a literal mind you have, my friend! Well; but if I were, like that good soul, head of an institution so exposed to police attentions, I would be at pains to provide myself with more than one secret avenue of escape—when the lights were out."

"You've got to make allowances for Morph," Pagan blandly declared; "he hasn't had your early advantages."

"What do I see?" Apparently possessed by the belief that some sharp distraction was indicated if open hostilities were to be averted, Liane pounced upon Lanyard's barely tasted highball. "And this hour I have been dying of thirst!" She gulped with gusto, making eyes at Lanyard over the glass. "Yours, my friend? Never mind: Folly will fetch you another."

"Do with a drink myself," Pagan volunteered. "No, don't you trouble, Mrs. McFee, I know the way."

He ducked briskly out into the hall and was presently heard in the dining-room making melody with glasses and siphons and ice.

Liane set aside an empty glass, crossed to Lanyard, and petted his cheek with the authentic professional touch. "You mustn't mind Peter, mon coco," she cooed affectionately in French. "He presumes, perhaps, but then he's a privileged type."

"Mind him?" Lanyard questioned in a tone that implied he found the thought weird. "Vermin, my dear Liane, were ever my pet aversion. If you set

any value on this insect, be good enough to keep him out from under my feet."

"Every time you do that," Folly grumbled in English, "you make me sick, to think of all the youth I wasted studying what I fondly thought was French."

Liane turned with a murmur of self-reproach, and gracefully posing on the broad arm of the easy chair passed a fair arm round Folly's even fairer shoulders.

"Forgive me, my pretty. Michael and I knew each other so long ago in that dear Paris of before the War, it goes against Nature to converse with him in any tongue but French. . . . Ah! my old one," she lamented to Lanyard. "Those old days! will we ever know their like again?"

Mistrustful of her drift, Lanyard briefly replied: "God forbid!"

Timely to catch the sense of these latter lines, Pagan returned, his countenance of a clown radiant with good nature restored by the fragrance of four eight-inch glasses on the tray beneath his nose.

"The dilute laughter of the peasants of Scotland," he announced, presenting the tray to Folly and Liane—"guaranteed to cure every heartache born of pining for a past that, if the truth were known, probably wasn't half so pleasant as the present—Prohibition and everything!" He presented the tray to Lanyard in turn, then, determined at all costs to win the centre of the stage, struck an absurd declamatory attitude. "To tonight and tomorrow," he toasted—"to hell with yesterday! Why waste good time mourning that which is immortal, anyway? All of yesterday that

mattered we carry with us, imperishably enshrined in our hearts. After all, what is the present more than the past plus? What man was yesterday, he is today, with something added. Eh, Mr. Lanyard?"

"Or subtracted."

"I disagree"—Pagan made him a formal salute—"with all due respect. Man adds daily to the sum of his experiences, which sum he is; but he can never subtract from that sum one iota of what he has been. The peasant who becomes a financier remains at heart a peasant still."

"A pretty thought," Liane interpolated with earnest interest. "But, to a woman, somewhat unsettling, is it not?"

Pagan stared: "How unsettling?"

"Why! by what you tell me, I find myself still a virgin."

"Don't be depressing. Here am I, being deuced entertaining and eloquent and profound, philosophizing on matters of the spirit, while you . . . Bah!" quoth Pagan. "But to continue: Give the financier who was a peasant respite from his cares, and whither turns his heart? Back to the stage of his young days; if he takes a vacation, he spends it in overalls down on the farm."

"And yours, one presumes, are devoted to making records for the gramophone?"

"Don't interrupt, Liane. . . . Or take, say a criminal who has abandoned his misguided ways and become a respected member of the community. How will he relax? Eh, Mr. Lanyard?"

"I will not presume to instruct monsieur on a point concerning which he is undoubtedly better informed than I."

Liane exploded a "Ho!" of pure joy, and Pagan shot Lanyard an envenomed glance which he was swift to mask with his well-worn smirk. "To be frank," he generously admitted, dropping into a conversational tone, "I had the Lone Wolf in mind. They say the fellow is here, in New York, now, and up to his old games again. I confess the thought rides my imagination, the puzzle of it. By all accounts, he went straight for years. How, then, came he to backslide? Were the claims of the past too strong? or the demands of the present? Does he steal today deliberately for gain? or involuntarily at the dictates of some subtle and deathless instinct?"

"But monsieur has so many entertaining theories, surely he will produce one to cover this hypothetical instance."

"I don't know. Nature is too strong for us, she laughs at all our efforts to revise her. We may repress and inhibit our native instincts as much as we will, but in the end, as a rule, they have their way. The Psychological Research Society reported, not long ago, the case of a man in whom the influence of instincts developed in early professional life were so strong that, buried though his criminal past was under a dozen years of law-abiding life, he reverted to old practices from time to time without knowing what he did; that is to say, in spells of amnesia, during which his first personality, the natural man, broke through the

veneer of the secondary or artificial personality with which he had so painstakingly overlaid it. A safe-breaker and jewel thief like this Lone Wolf. Interesting if this were another such case."

"Interesting, indeed, monsieur, if conceivable."

"But think a minute, and I believe you'll admit it's easily conceivable. Imagine such a man, with wits and senses all habituated by years of rigorous training to serve his predatory nature. Because he's trying to live an honest life today doesn't mean that those old, ingrained habits have necessarily ceased to function. To the contrary, I imagine, they are always at work. As he goes to and fro and meets men and women who invite him into their homes—in their ignorance of his former identity, of course—inevitably, I maintain, such a man will always be observing and valuing and formulating plans of attack—subconsciously, perhaps, but still and for all that making use of the faculties he trained in other days. I can believe he never visits a home of any consequence without taking away with him a comprehensive scheme for burglarizing it. As you or I might, Mr. Lanyard, if either of us had the education of the Lone Wolf, say in respect of this very house. . . . And then some night, when he's least dreaming of anything of the sort, the old Adam reasserts itself, without or with his will and cognizance—"

Perhaps a little frightened by the gleam in Lanyard's eyes and the tension of his lips, Liane bounced up vivaciously, ran to Pagan, and clapped a palm over his mouth.

"Peter!" she cried—"you make me tired, you talk so much. Once you get started, you never know when to stop. But now you will stop, I insist that you stop and take me home. It is nearly three, and I am weary to the marrow of my bones, too fatigued to listen another instant to your twaddle."

Lanyard contrived with fair enough grace to decline Pagan's magnanimous offer of a lift in his car; but by the time he found himself on Fifth avenue again was half sorry he had. There were no taxicabs cruising for fares at that hour, at least all he spied were tearing along with metal flags reversed; and his head was at one and the same time buzzing with fumes of whiskey and thick with that drowsiness of which he had first become sensible in the cab with Folly McFee. Singularly enough, that cloud had lifted during his stop in her home, whereas since leaving it, ever since he had drawn his first breath of the dank, chill air of the streets, his wits had been like slugs fumbling blindly in a bed of cotton-wool. Now his feet as well were beginning to feel leaden, walking, ordinarily a source of such keen enjoyment to this man of vigorous physical life, had become a task.

Hard to understand how one could have been so affected by the scanty ration of alcohol one had consumed that evening, a solitary glass of champagne at the Clique, a single Scotch and soda two hours later. It might be, of course, that Pagan had mixed too stiff a highball. One hadn't been so impressed while drinking, but now the flavour of the whisky clung to the palate, harshly reminiscent. Evidently not such good stuff as it had seemed at the first sip.

Odd to find oneself resuming one's homeward walk at almost the very point where that rencontre with Liane had interrupted it. Still more odd, how that affair had resulted; in three brief hours everything had come true that one had foretold in seeking to dissuade Eve from the idea of marriage . . .

In a surge of grim rage Lanyard pledged Morpheus and Pagan ample grounds for repentance should they show any disposition to persist in tampering with his concerns.

Then he found occasion to execrate the weather, too, perceiving that it had been only holding off till now, when it had him at its mercy. Now all at once it ceased to tease and settled down to rain in dogged earnest and get the business over with.

And still no taxis . . .

Lanyard turned up the collar of his overcoat and dug both hands into its pockets, clipping stick under arm and plodding heavily through the shining puddles, with every labored step growing more conscious of bodily oppression and the lethargy that ruled his mind, feeling more abused in some vague how and aggrieved.

In the many-hued lights of the street the back-spatter of raindrops drilling on the sidewalk churned in rainbow iridescence, a froth of phantom jewels, enchanting, evanescent . . .

Strange that one should never have remarked this effect ere now . . . Stranger still how blindly man was wont to move through the world, benighted to its wonders, only in rare moments cheating the bandages with which individualism sealed his eyes and catching

glimpses fugitive and ravishing of beauty adorning the most hackneyed ways . . . As now when, lifting dazzled eyes, Lanyard beheld himself a lonely wayfarer in a lane of jewels set in jet and gold . . .

Jewels that outrivalled even those the Sultan of Loot had paraded, and Liane, and that other woman . . . pretty little thing so well named . . . What the deuce was her name? Folly? Folly McFee!

Idiotic to mislay so soon a distinctive name like that . . .

Wading in jewels. Up to one's knees. As Liane waded in them, and Folly, and the Sultan of Loot . . . Between them these three must have had on display that night stones that would fetch four or five hundred thousand . . . flaunting them in the face of a pauper!

A pauper? Well: little better! Penniless, or next door to it. A few more days of running round with Eve . . . who must never guess . . . and he would be stoney. Not pinched for money—broke. The reward of virtue . . .

Lanyard laughed aloud, a cracked, ugly laugh.

Pagan hadn't been far wrong. Impertinent clown! Not far wrong, at that . . . Anything but easy to forget the cunning one once had gloried in, to remain forever deaf and dumb to the insidious prompting of instincts which, as long as the sun shone, seemed to have been utterly stamped out and exterminated, but which, when clouds massed and the wind bared its teeth, had an accursed habit of proving they had been but rebelliously quiescent . . .

Curious, how close to the line that mountebank had hewn in his guesswork at the psychology of the outlaw reclaimed!

There lingered still a picture instantaneously printed upon the sensitive film of consciousness, in that moment when Lanyard had stood peering out of the rear window at Folly McFee's: a view of the roof of a one-storey extension running back from the window, a flat roof decked over to serve as a terrace in warm weather, with, beyond it, thanks to an excavation being dug for a new building on the north side of the block, nothing between the house and the next street but a board fence enclosing the kitchen-yard. An open invitation to any man who might fancy the jewels of Folly McFee; jewels that, shrewdly marketed, would put a careful man beyond want for the rest of his days . . .

Lanyard growled an oath, gave himself an angry shake. What the devil had got into him tonight, that he should consent for a single instant to indulge such a train of thought?

Not that there was danger of *his* being tempted . . . He gave a thick chuckle of scorn. Nevertheless it was annoying to find oneself unable to forget that the temptation was there.

All the fault of that reptile with his viperous tongue and machine-made leer, What's-his-name . . . What *was* his name? Fagin? No: Pagan. Loathsome creature . . .

What an ass one had been to swallow his insolence simply because there were women present, to let such an illogical consideration restrain one from yielding

to natural, primitive impulse and, with every provocation, throttling the fellow, wringing his scrawny neck . . .

In amaze Lanyard emerged from a seizure of sodden insanity to find himself at halt in front of the Waldorf, standing quite still in the driving rain and glaring at his hands, which were extended with tensed fingers compressing the windpipe of an imaginary victim.

What was he doing? He made an effort to pull himself together, and cast glances right and left, shame-faced to think that he might have been seen. But there was not another soul in sight on the whole, undulant length of the Avenue. Only a taxi shot past, and its driver hooted . . .

He seemed to have mislaid his stick. After a moment of myopic searching he gave it up, pocketed his hands and lunged on. . . . Not far to go now; but one made indifferent progress because of the fog. Of course it was fog! What else could make the lights so dim? Like a London fog, a London particular. And getting thicker every minute, blotting out the lights as a blotting paper sops up ink, leaving only blurs, faint and formless blotches fading into night absolute, black and steaming . . .

In a sudden saffron blaze Lanyard identified the common aspect of the small suite of rooms which he rented furnished. He was in the sitting-room, wrestling with his overcoat. Soaked through and dripping, the wretched thing seemed possessed of a devil of perversity which resisted all his efforts to shed it. He

gave an infuriated wriggle, heard something rip, and discovered, in some surprise, that he was rid of it. Then with indignation he saw that the door stood open to the public hall, a staring oblong of black in the lighted walls. Lurching to this, Lanyard flung it shut with a thundering crash.

The problem of escaping from the intimate embrace of his dress-coat next engaged his intelligence. Something he couldn't afford to tear off his back. Yet he darkly foresaw difficulties. After a while of pondering, a spirit of low cunning prompted him to try to deceive the thing by making believe he didn't care whether it came off or not. . . . And astonishingly it appeared that this stratagem had been successful: he was holding the garment in his hands. With the harsh, unfeeling laugh of a conqueror he cast it from him and shaped a course for his bedchamber. And barely in time: that London fog had stolen in after him somehow, probably through the door he had carelessly left open, Heaven knew how long. . . . At its old tricks, dimming down the lights till one could hardly see. Rapidly, too. He succeeded in beating the darkness to his bed, but with nothing to spare: as he sat on its edge, fumbling with his shoes, night whelmed the world with a stunning crash . . .

VI

A SPLITTING headache roused Lanyard out of the void, with the help of an unfeeling hand that shook his shoulder, and a voice that heartlessly dinned his name into his ears.

When he tried to remonstrate his other shoulder was captured by another vice-like hand, and he was raised to a sitting position on the side of the bed. There, bending forward and clasping his head with both hands lest it rend itself in twain, he regained a measure of lucidity.

Broad daylight was flooding the room, not sunlight but the warm reflection of a sunny sky, beyond telling painful to optic nerves. On throbbing eardrums a voice jarred, hideously cheerful.

"Well: how're you feeling now?"

Without understanding Lanyard blinked into the homely, grinning countenance of Crane.

"Pretty rocky, I'll tell the World, the Tribune and the Herald! Next time you'll know better than to take liberties with lawless liquor—or I miss my guess. Got anything in the place good for a wrecked dome?"

Unwisely Lanyard sought to reply with a shake of the head under consideration. His moans were heart-rendering. When he got them under control he heard Crane say: "Well, son! it's a good thing to have a

true friend on the job when you're feeling like this. You set there and take it easy while I run down to the drug store and fetch you a pick-me-up."

What were intended to be words of gratitude in response came out as the most disconsolate noises imaginable. Crane's footsteps receded through the sitting-room and died out beyond a door which was closed with thoughtful care. Pricked by pride, Lanyard put forth a tremendous effort of will and stood up.

Not till then did he appreciate that he was fully clothed but for his shoes and the dress-coat which he had a muggy memory of having discarded in the adjoining room.

When Crane re-entered without knocking, Lanyard was splashing in the bath-room. Some minutes later he came out wrapped in a dressing-gown and bearing some resemblance to his normal, self-respecting self. A steaming hot soak followed by five minutes under an icy needle-shower had moderated the headache to a bearable grumble. Crane was waiting with a tall and foaming glass. A draught long and acrid but grateful. The flavour of aromatic spirits of ammonia replacing that of aloes in his mouth, Lanyard was able to express his thanks with a smile less wan than might have been expected.

"I think you called yourself a true friend," he said: "that was true talk. Never in my life have I needed one more." Subsiding into a chair, he waved a feeble hand toward another. "Sit down and tell me to what I owe this act of mercy . . ."

"Well: if you want to know, I guess you owe it

mainly to forgetting to lock your door when you crashed in last night." Crane sat down and favoured Lanyard with a quizzical stare, caressing lean jaws with bony fingers. "I knocked till I was tired, then tried the door, feeling pretty sure you were at home, because I could see by the transom you had all the lights going full blast. So I just naturally walked in and found you practically a total loss. You were cold sober when I saw you at two o'clock, but you sure did manage to collect a skinful between then and the time you turned in, whenever that was."

"To the best of my knowledge, not much after three."

"Blessed if I see how you managed it. Mind telling? I don't like to seem nosey, but this record you're claiming for the standing broad jag in one hour flat has got me guessing. Didn't know you went in much for that sort of thing."

"No more do I," Lanyard protested. "That is to say, I never did before and never will again, Heaven helping me to avoid further entanglements with temperance drinks."

"That what you call 'em?"

"I mean, the sort of drinks one's friends serve in these Prohibition times. I hesitate to ask you to believe that the ruin you see before you was wrought by one small glass of champagne at the Clique last night, followed by a single Scotch and soda at Mrs. McFee's."

"From the funny things I've seen bootliquor do in the last few months," Crane replied—"some of 'em

not so darned funny, at that—I'm ready to believe anything you want to blame on it. What bothers me now, is you getting such stuff at Mrs. Folliott McFee's. That little lady is well enough fixed to keep her cellar stocked with the best. However," he reconsidered, "I guess she must've got it from her friend Morphew. She's been training considerably with him and his gang of late; and I wouldn't put it past that bird to poison his best friend for a profit of a few dollars a case."

"We see Mr. Morphew with the same eyes, you and I."

Lanyard wanted very much to question Crane for information concerning Mr. Hugh Morphew, but felt much too listless just then. Another time would do as well, when his mental processes had somewhat recuperated.

"So you were at Mrs. McFee's last night, were you?"

"Naturally, I had to see her home," Lanyard replied. "She asked me in to have that drink; and a little later the Delorme woman dropped in with a hyena who calls himself Pagan—daresay you know who I mean"—Crane nodded—"to make sure Mrs. McFee had come to no harm. You see, we were all guests of Morphew's at the Clique when you raided the place. But I presume that's no news . . ."

"You're wrong, then. Morphew and his lot got away clean. We couldn't find hair nor hide of him or any of the parties you've named. They must have beaten it by some secret passage while the lights were on the blink."

Liane and Pagan, then, had lied about being turned back from the roof. Not that it mattered . . .

"How'd you get on with the pretty McFee?" Crane was pursuing with an interest too elaborately casual.

"Well enough, thanks. She seems a nice little thing if a thought flighty."

"Flighty's the word. I guess you haven't known her long."

"Only met her last night, a few minutes before the raid."

"Nice place she's got . . ."

"Nice enough," Lanyard assented languidly.

"Get much of a show to look around while you were there?"

Lanyard opened his eyes. "You're not asking these questions for conversation's sake."

"You're dead right I'm not," Crane drawled, stroking his jaws. "Guess I may as well break it to you. Mrs. McFee reported this morning, her house had been broken into last night, some time between three o'clock and daylight, her safe opened—little tin box she keeps in her boodwah—and the pick of her jewels looted."

"So!" said Lanyard—"it's to that I owe this honour."

"You've had such a lot of experience in that line, I thought maybe you wouldn't mind giving me a few tips . . ."

Lanyard lounged back in his chair again, tolerantly smiling.

"Why trifle with the truth to spare my feelings?"

"Well!" Crane uncomfortably conceded—"I don't mind telling you, the job had all the ear-marks of one of the Lone Wolf's."

"Indeed?"

"The bird that opened that box did it painlessly, like you always used to, going on all I've heard—just talked to the works till the safe lay down and rolled over with all four paws in the air. Of course, he didn't leave any finger-marks. He got in by way of an extension at the back of the house: there's a French window opens onto it from the study. He didn't even need to jimmy that, though Mrs. McFee and the servants can't explain how it come to be open. In fact, the butler swears he latched it himself before he went to bed. Looks like somebody must have fixed it . . ."

"Somebody who, like your obedient servant, had plenty of opportunity."

"You got the idea."

"In short," said Lanyard, "what you are delicately trying to convey is that you'd be obliged if I'd come along quietly."

"No," Crane surprisingly answered: "nothing like that."

"Not—?" Lanyard persisted, in an unbelieving stare.

"No. . . . I'll admit, I looked you up today with a divided mind. I couldn't somehow believe it of you. On the other hand, I've been fooled by a lot of human nature in my time. But you put in an alibi, even before you came to, sound enough to satisfy me. Maybe I'm wrong about you, Lanyard, maybe you're as crooked

as a Revenue inspector; but nothing will ever make me believe you pulled that job and then pickled yourself to celebrate, or that the Lone Wolf ever went home after cracking a box and crawled into the hay leaving his front door unlocked. Not only that, but just to make sure, in a perfectly friendly way, I frisked your pockets and searched these rooms high and low before I woke you up. You've got a good right to be sore, if it hits you that way; but I figured it was my duty as a friend as well as an officer of the law."

"On the contrary," Lanyard sincerely assured him, "I am appreciative and grateful, glad to be cleared in your sight, even more glad to be cleared in my own."

"In your own?" Crane repeated in perplexity. "What d'you think you mean by that?"

"I'm glad I do not have to wonder if possibly I did this thing in my sleep, so to speak."

"Quit your kidding!" Crane got up with a laugh. "I've got to be getting along now, oughtn't to have lost as much time as I have."

"I shall miss your soothing presence. But I am sure you understand that there are times, and this is one of them, when one would rather be alone."

"You said it."

"You will pardon my not rising to see you to the door?"

"Stay right where you are. I'll drop in again, some time this evening, maybe, to see how you are."

"Do. There are many things I want to consult you about when I feel better able."



A Columbia Pictures Corporation Production.

AN UNINVITED GUEST AT THE BAL MASQUE, THE LONE WOLF BRAVES THE
SCRUTINY OF THE DETECTIVES.

The Lone Wolf Returns.

"Well: if anything gets in my way and I don't show up like I said . . . " Crane fished out a card from a worn wallet and placed it on the mantelpiece of the old-fashioned marble fireplace: "There's my name and number. Give me a ring any time you feel like it, and I'll blow you to a dinner with, maybe, something on the side whose kick isn't quite as deadly as a Georgia mule's."

For upwards of an hour after the detective had taken himself off, Lanyard lingered on in the easy chair, listlessly reviewing his memories of the previous night, memories comfortably clear-cut up to a certain stage . . .

After all, he were an ingrate to complain, surely he had no excuse for considering himself in disgrace with fortune, who had come thus far through this conjuncture retaining the confidence of Crane, but best of all his own!

He counted himself happy indeed—for all the malaise from which he still suffered and which only time and heroic measures in the way of exercise would do away with altogether—that Crane's investigation, while he lay senseless, had resolved every question that might otherwise have perturbed his secret mind. It was grateful to be spared the torment that, but for this exoneration, must have been his, the fear that he might himself, without his knowledge, have proved there was support in fact for the theory of criminal psychology which Pagan had advanced, the theory that it was well within the compass of possibility for a man in his plight, in sore financial straits and subconsciously

tempted beyond his strength, to commit a theft while in a phase of auto-hypnosis coupled with amnesia, a condition comparable with somnambulism . . .

Otherwise his affairs, as Lanyard saw them, had come suddenly to a precarious pass.

In spite of the fact that he knew his intelligence would need some time to recover its accustomed competence, he entertained no slightest doubt but that he would be tomorrow, as he was today, convinced that the abstraction of the McFee jewels had been merely the first move in a campaign shrewdly planned to bring him to Morpew's terms.

His defiance of that one had not been tardy of result: the enemy had not only accepted his declaration of war, he had committed the first overt act.

Lanyard's temper hardened. If Morpew wanted war, he should have his fill . . .

But if war it must be, this was no time to waste in inaction: the enemy was already in the field and taking the offensive, while he lay resting.

Rising, Lanyard bestirred himself to set his house in order.

When he had shaved and dressed and dosed himself with stabilizing draughts of black coffee, he began to collect the clothes he had worn overnight, all of which would require the attentions of a valet before they would be again presentable. Rain had defaced the gloss of his topper beyond repair but by the hatter's iron. His trousers were damp and wrinkled bags of black stuff splashed to the knees with mud.

Over these stains Lanyard frowned. Impossible to

understand how he had managed to come by the worst of them, even taking into account the condition in which he had traversed Fifth Avenue during the storm. The marks of that thin black ooze which accumulates on asphaltum explained themselves. But there were others inexplicable, and on his patent leather boots as well, smears and crusts of ochre mud which he could hardly have accumulated without wandering into broken ground, such as was not to be found on Fifth avenue at any point within the bounds of his besotted promenade.

But he distinctly recollected noticing an excavation behind the residence of Folly McFee. . . .

With a worried shake of his head that cost him several stabs of anguish, Lanyard folded and laid aside the trousers, and returned to the sitting-room to get his dress-coat.

As he took this up something in one of the coat-tail pockets struck against a leg of the table with a muffled but clashing thump.

By his own account, Crane had already rummaged the pockets of the garment, but conceivably the coat-tail pockets he had overlooked, who was better acquainted with dress clothes of American tailoring, from which such conveniences are commonly omitted. Lanyard's clothes, however, had been built in London; and to the British tailor coat-tail pockets are as an article of faith.

An exploring hand brought forth a little packet knotted in a handkerchief, one of his own.

Lanyard surmised its contents before he had succeeded in loosing the knots.

With a sense of sickness, he stood staring down at the stolen jewels of Folly McFee.

VII

IN sequel the life of Michael Lanyard knew some of its busiest moments, his modest lodgings were the stage of a scene of rare animation whose solitary actor figured as the restless axis of a whirlwind of garments. Then the air, clearing, disclosed the man decently clad for the street and stowing away in a safe pocket his unchancy treasure-trove.

Thus far he had gone about doing what he had to do automatically in a measure, as one will in times of extremity, putting off against an hour more opportune, when he might bring a clearer head to bear upon the business, too, the deliberate study which his troubles needed. Enough now to know the longer he delayed where he was, the more immediate his peril of suffering a second domiciliary visit by the police; who on this new occasion, beyond much doubt, would be represented by agents less kindly biassed than Crane, more skeptical and thoroughgoing in the matter of searching for Folly McFee's emeralds. It remained for Lanyard to prove appreciation of this fleeting smile of fortune by turning to good account the slender chance it granted to work out his salvation in his own time and way.

One detail, however, he dared not slight, though it cost minutes each more precious than the last: Lan-

yard left behind him shoes and trousers from which every lingering suspicion of mud had been erased.

Some two hours later, after a tedious tale of twists and turns in the labyrinth of New York's several transportation systems, he left a train at the Mount Vernon terminal of the subway extension, and addressed himself to the tramp back to New York.

The sky was bright, the Indian Summer sunlight kind, the air inspiriting. By the time Lanyard had stretched his legs over a mile or two of by-roads—chosen for the long and lonely perspectives which enabled him to make sure he travelled with no other shadow than his own—he began to feel once more competent to ponder his fix and plot a way out.

No easy task: the problem posed by the fact that he had somehow, at some time in the course of the preceding night, unwittingly come into possession of stolen property, seemed open to solution only on one of two hypotheses, antagonistic, and neither at a glance more likely than the other. Failing his ability to turn up proof that another hand had rifled the McFee safe and secreted its loot in his coat while he slept, Lanyard would have to become reconciled to the belief that he himself had stolen the jewels while in a phase of submerged consciousness. Distasteful as was the bare suggestion, and human though the temptation was to adopt the more grateful theory and guide himself thereby, he still could not but doubt: the other was all too possibly the true explanation.

One thing at least he might take for granted, that the drink Pagan had brought him was drugged. But

here again the lane of likelihood developed a confounding fork: Who could say whether the drug had been added to the drink by Pagan, or whether the whiskey itself had been one of those deadly synthetic concoctions with which that bastard offspring of Prohibition, the bootlegging industry, had flooded the land?

If it were the whiskey that Lanyard had to blame, Pagan, too, and Folly McFee and Liane Delorme must have suffered as severely, Liane even more, since she had made away with two drinks to Lanyard's one. . . . A simple matter to find out the truth, if one only knew the woman's address; but she had neglected to say where she was stopping, and other than those whom under the circumstances he would hardly care to consult, Lanyard could think of nobody who would be likely to know.

And even though investigation might prove that nobody else had been so punished, and thus satisfy Lanyard that his drink alone had maliciously been doctored, such knowledge would not necessarily lead him nearer to the facts of the robbery. Comfortable though it was to impute to Pagan the mischief with the whiskey, and assume that its object had been to throw Lanyard into coma and thus render it feasible to enter his rooms without his knowledge, smear yellow mud on his clothing and plant the plunder in his pocket, still it remained possible that the arch-intelligence which had decreed the administration of the drug, whether Morpheus's or another's, had reckoned with even more diabolical cunning upon its breaking down those inhi-

bitions which honour and faith and a good intent had imposed upon a nature perhaps—and for all Lanyard could assert to the contrary—irreclaimably a thief's.

Hashish was reputed to work like that, to act upon its victims precisely as an acid eats away lacquer, stripping off layer by layer the most stubborn crust of honour and habit ever indurated by conscience and civilized convention, baring at last the primitive beast that lurks in every man.

No matter: though the identity of the thief must be a riddle still, to learn the truth about the whiskey would resolve the primary doubts that were harassing Lanyard and leave him better advised concerning what further steps would be required to clear up the mystery altogether. To this end the one thing now distinctly indicated was the need for action prompt, direct, and drastic.

Lanyard had not forgotten that appointment for the following afternoon which he must be able to keep with a clear mind and a clean heart, unapprehensive of any sort of interference.

He began to foresee a programme for the intervening night tolerably long and arduous. He had to hit upon some way to disembarass himself of the emeralds that would clear him of all suspicion of ever having had anything to do with them. He had further to acquit or convict Pagan of tampering with his drink—and in the event of the conviction which he anticipated with entire confidence, to invent and enforce some means of persuading Pagan and his lot that Michael Lanyard was a good man to let alone.

Now dusk was closing down upon the world in shade on shade of lilac, violet and blue, through which, moment by moment, the lights of the outlying city were blowing their blossoms of silver and gold. Directly ahead of Lanyard the electric sign of a roadhouse exploded its soundless salvo against the sky; and thus reminded that he needed food, who had so much to do ere dawn, he entered the place and dined with a frugality considerate of digestive powers sadly out of kilter. Then in the dark of the young night he resumed his walk, and between nine and half-past might have been (only that he took good care not to be) seen at pause on the Lexington avenue corner of the block in which Folly McFee dwelt, quietly reconnoitering the approach to her residence.

The house stood on the north side of the street, nearer Lexington avenue than Park, and with windows diffusing a dim glow through discreet draperies presented to the beholder the demure face that suited an establishment whose youthful chatelaine sported a sobriquet so apt and alluring.

Observers less interested than Lanyard was then have been known feelingly to comment upon the impish trick houses frequently practice of keeping their own counsel: the shrewdest reader of façades would have gathered nothing informing from the aspect worn that night by the dwelling of Folly McFee, no clue as to whether its pretty resident were at home, or, if at home, alone . . .

Lanyard hazarded a saunter past on the sidewalk opposite. Under more direct scrutiny the house re-

mained as little communicative, the only profit he had of the manœuvre was the assurance that nobody was skulking in any of the areaways over across from it, on the watch for the likes of himself. But then there was no conceivable reason why anybody should be; not even his most impassioned ill-wisher, much less an unimaginative police force, could have been expected to divine that any attraction could possibly draw this putative criminal back to haunt the scene of his alleged crime.

Lanyard nevertheless, on gaining the Park avenue corner, merely crossed the street and continued his stroll through the next to the north, passing on the way the gaping foundation pit observed the night before from the windows of Folly's study, a survey of which from this new angle confirmed his belief that the thief need not have found it difficult to make his way into the backyard and swarm up to the roof of the extension. On the other hand, this aspect of the premises afforded Lanyard no least twinge of guilty reminiscence. Another circumstance that proved nothing; if his personal acquaintance with downright drunkenness was limited, he knew too well that it was quite possible for one to drink oneself into a state of alcoholic insanity and retain, on coming out of it, no memory of one's performances while in that condition.

Circumnavigation of the block having brought him again into the street upon which the McFee residence faced, but this time on its northern sidewalk, Lanyard's pace slackened; and idlest insouciance masked the surge of acute interest in him when, at twenty paces'

distance, he saw the iron gate to its service entrance swing open and a maid emerge and make briskly off toward Park avenue—a tidy figure in black dress, white apron and cap, taking letters to post at the corner letter-box in time for the last collection.

Another freak of friendly fortune? or one of ill-favoured fate? The thing was too confoundedly well-timed, the invitation of that unguarded entrance too tempting. Indeed, when it occurred to Lanyard that his action might have been considered a thought precipitate, it was too late to turn back, he had already slipped into the service hallway and restored the door to the position, half on the latch, in which the woman had left it. To change his mind now and retreat would be to court her attention, who would already be on her way back from the corner.

The hallway was long, narrow, dimly lighted. At its far end a stairway led down to kitchen offices. Midway, a swing-door communicated with the main body of the house. Through this Lanyard had no choice but to dart, reckless of what might await him on its far side: to linger where he was meant immediate discovery . . . and the emeralds on his person!

The swing-door gave into a butler's pantry, at the moment empty, where another opened into the dining-room and a third to the main hallway. Stacks of dishes in the pantry sink, no less than a clash of cheerful voices in the room adjoining, with Folly's rippling laughter clearly recognizable, told of a dinner party still in progress. The other living-rooms, then, ought to be untenanted. The butler due to pop back from

the dining-room at any instant, Lanyard passed on to the entrance-hall, and experienced a relief, on finding it deserted, that betrayed an old hand sorely out of practice: the day had been when he could have taken far more desperate chances without a tremor.

Even so, he wasted no gestures. To go the way he meant to go, he had the dining-room door to pass, the risk to run of being seen. He edged to a point whence Folly's back was visible, and the butler, a decent, plodding, British body, taking himself off with an emptied decanter. He disappeared; and the pantry-door was heard to buffet the air. Lanyard waited a minute, then coolly ran—or, rather, stumped—the risk of the open door, trusting, if noticed by any of the diners, to pass as the butler with some business in the front part of the house. To the best of his observation his audacity served: the dinner-party seemed to be finding itself much too amusing to have attention to spare for matters of domestic routine. But one swift glance askance noted that Folly was entertaining only Pagan, Liane Delorme, and Mallison.

So much for Lanyard's solemn sermon on the dangers of questionable associations!

But could one fairly have expected anything better, when Folly had been given, subsequently, every reason to believe she had entertained in that overnight moralist a felon unawares? This, presumably, was her way of consoling herself for having been so shamefully taken in: as gay a *partie carrée* as heart could wish, figuratively making merry on the very coffin-lid of Folly's most recent bereavement . . .

Fragments were all Lanyard could garner of the talk, who had no time at all to spare; but what little he did overhear was instructive. Folly, he learned, was firmly declining to be down-hearted: the police had given her every assurance that she would be wearing her emeralds again within a few days at most. Meantime, she knew no lack of objects of bedizenment: the thief in his haste had overlooked a secret cache of treasure in the safe he had used so cavalierly, she had still the McFee pearls and diamonds to don for protection against inclement elements; in witness whereof she was wearing them now. Challenged by Pagan to state what steps, if any, she had taken to safeguard these against the chance that the marauder might return to cancel his oversight, Folly laughed the notion to scorn, but under pressure admitted that she meant to have the combination of the safe changed as soon as she could remember to telephone its maker.

Communications all pitched in a key of the lightest banter. Folly, for example, was pleased to recount the antics of her maiden aunt when it dawned upon her that she had actually slept all through the visit of a burglar: the good woman had forthwith gone into hysterics and had come out of them only to pack herself off (at Folly's expense) to Atlantic City, professing the slender hope that a vacation from this theatre of crime would mend a shattered nervous system. In view of which Folly was disposed to hold the loss of her emeralds a not unmixed affliction. And when Pagan suggested that it might be good business for Folly to put a professional house-breaker on her

weekly payroll, Liane applauded his wit with a deep-chested laugh.

No more need to wonder how this last had fared after her two drinks of the liquor a single dose of which had been enough to put Lanyard hors de combat. True: Liane might have been innocent of what was intended. But it wasn't easy to give her the benefit of the doubt.

As for Pagan, the pencilled question-mark against his name had been replaced by a cross in indelible ink.

VIII

FROM a point close by the street door rose a flight of stairs which introduced Lanyard to a floor by every indication devoted wholly to the most intimate uses of Folly. There were two major rooms, a bed-chamber at the back of the house and a boudoir overlooking the street, linked by a short hall on which opened a bath-room and capacious clothes-presses, all furnished with an extravagance that bespoke means ample to gratify the wildest whim of even a modern young woman. Folly's wardrobe alone would have given a dozen exacting women of fashion a choice of changes for every hour of the day and have left the first owner still ridiculously over-stocked. And Lanyard, taking cursory yet comprehensive note of the endless detail of luxury that went to make up a sybaritic ensemble, told himself it would be unreasonable to expect the tenant of this suite not to fancy herself much more than merely a little.

His survey, however, had gained him little more than a bare grasp of the general arrangement, when a light patter on the stairs drove him to cover in a retreat whose selection had been his first care: a closet stored with clothing for day-wear exclusively, therefore the least liable to be used by night, and furthermore so situate that its door, left—as Lanyard had found it—half an inch ajar, afforded a direct and wide-angled vista of the boudoir, and also, indirectly,

by grace of a long mirror in the latter, a more fragmentary view of the bedchamber.

To his taste almost too cosily snuggled into a smother of garments whose subtle fragrance was most demoralizing, he lurked for many minutes, spying—as the mirrow permitted—on the maid whom he had first seen in the street and whose present duty, it transpired, was to turn down the bed-clothes and otherwise make the bedchamber ready to receive its mistress.

The quick, competent creature went about her work with a step so light that even ears trained to abnormal acuteness found it not entirely easy to keep track of her movements; so that, when she made an end and left the bedchamber, the man in hiding wasted several minutes waiting to make sure that he had the floor all to himself again.

Emerging at length, he wasted no more, but turned directly to the focal point of his most immediate interest, that is to say to the safe which had provided the wits of last night's thief with a test so trifling. And, Lanyard reflected, having inspected the thing, no wonder! When, he asked impatiently, would man learn anything from experience and cease to put his trust and his treasures in repositories of such pregnable construction? A pretty, dainty thing, neatly fitted into the base of a period secretary, its door masked by a hinged frame wrought to resemble a tier of drawers, its "combination-lock"—God save the mark!—capable of offering about as much resistance to trained talents as that of a child's bank . . .

Lanyard was proving all this to his own satisfaction,

and indeed had already solved the combination by bending an ear to the fall of its tumblers, when the telephone rang.

The sharp thrill of the bell sounded in the study downstairs; the extension instrument on the little desk in the boudoir gave only a muffled click.

Lanyard used a silk handkerchief on the face of the safe to smudge out fingerprints, shut the false front, and moved lightly out into the hall, arriving at the rail round the stairway at the moment when the vocational singsong of the butler broke upon the conversation of Folly and her friends:

"Beg pardon, but Mr. Mallison is being wanted on the telephone."

With neither delay nor compunction Lanyard turned back to the boudoir extension, and had its receiver at his ear when Mallison arrived in the study and breathed a melodious "Hello?" to the waiting wire. But when a strange voice answered him, feminine at that, the eavesdropper was taken with a twinge of mixed chagrin and distaste, who had hoped for something worse than this and more illuminating, who had hastily set his heart on gaining instruction from Morpheus's pompously measured rumble, and who, finally, knew no delight whatever in the prospect of prying upon some trivial affair of sentiment such as was promised by the cloying affection of this strange woman's salutation: "Is that you, Mally darling?"

Only the striking ambiguity of the reply she got helped Lanyard to overcome an impulse to hang up forthwith.

"Yes," Mallison pronounced too clearly, too loudly, and in a manner of cold enquiry that carried no conviction whatever—"this is Mr. Mallison speaking. Who wants him?"

"Clever old sweetie!" the unknown applauded with a confidential laugh. "I do hope she can hear you; but I suppose she isn't in the same room if you have to shout like that. Better soft-pedal it a bit, dear, or the little lady may get leary."

To this Mallison replied, again remarkably as to sense, and in accents of unmistakably mortified amazement: "Oh, for Heaven's sake! you don't mean to say it's tonight? I don't see how I could possibly have let anything so important slip my mind . . ."

No less remarkably the woman pursued: "It's all right, then, dearie? I mean, everything is all set for the big bust?"

"Why, of course!" Mallison intoned distinctly, with a dying echo of the emotion which had coloured his last preceding response—"of course I'll be there. But I shall have to go down on my knees and beg Mrs. McFee to forgive me—and I really can't quite forgive myself for being so forgetful."

"Gosh!" the other breathed in awed admiration—"got to hand it to you, kid, you stall so pretty. Well: our friend—you know—is getting impatient, so it's up to you to shake a leg. How soon shall I say you'll be ready?"

"Oh, but really! I'm afraid I can hardly make it under half an hour."

"Sure that'll be long enough?" Surprising solici-

tude seemed to shade the strange voice. "You know, dearie, we wouldn't for worlds crash in too soon, I mean before you get a good chance to do your very best dirty work. 'Cause the blacker the looks of it, the better the pay—and the surer."

"Oh quite!" Mallison cheerily agreed. "But half an hour will do me famously."

"Good enough." A sly chuckle accompanied this commendation. "You're one little fast worker, all right, darling: I only wanted you to take all the time you need to turn out an artistic job. All rightie: I'll set the alarm for thirty minutes from now—the zero hour! And mind you take good care of yourself, dearie. Ta-ta."

With elegance indisputable Mallison returned a musical "Au revoir."

Lanyard waited for the other receiver to refind its hook, then hung up in turn, and took his seething mystification back to the head of the stairs, whence he could overhear the apologies Mallison was offering below.

"Do be charitable, Folly, and make allowances for my weak mind. I simply can not understand how I could have been so great an idiot as to forget I'd promised Mary Ashe—Mrs. Stuyvesant Ashe, you know—I'd join a party she's made up for the Rendezvous tonight—"

"O Mally!" Mrs. McFee lamented—"how perfectly stupid!"

"I know: isn't it? But I promised over a week ago. And anyway, it's partly your fault, getting up this little

dinner to celebrate your robbery, and making me forget everything else I had on for tonight. . . . Now please don't budge—and I don't need Soames to put me out, either. I know where I left my hat and coat and how to open and shut a front door all by myself."

"You can take my car, Mally, if you'll send it right back," Pagan generously put in. "Liane and I have got to hop along, too, in a brace of shakes. That is, you're welcome to it if you find it waiting. I told Ben to be back around ten."

"Thanks, old soul; but I'll have no trouble picking up a taxi over on Park avenue. Besides, it isn't nearly ten yet."

Pronouncing gracious but hurried good-nights all round, Mallison was heard to pass through the entrance hall, in a more guarded and intimate tone, and a decidedly tender one, remonstrating with his hostess because she had insisted on accompanying him to the door.

"Consider the looks of it, Folly: Liane and Peter will think you've fallen for me at last."

"No fear," Folly returned with uncomplimentary composure: "they know better."

"Besides, anyone would think you didn't trust me . . ."

This rang a note so false as to cause the eyebrows of the secret audience to lift and knit. But Folly's frame of mind was too completely and openly petulant to permit of her being wary and discriminative as well.

"Trust you!" she mocked lightly. "I'd like to know why I should, the way you carry on with women . . ."

Oh! I'm not in the least taken in by this tale about Mrs. Stuyvesant Ashe, you know, I believe that's just bunk to cover up a heavy date with some other misguided female."

"How perfectly flattering!"

"You wouldn't think so if you knew my opinion of the kind of women that fall for you, Mally."

The two moved into Lanyard's field of vision and paused by the door, Mallison buttoning himself into his top-coat and leering down at Folly with a doggish air, the woman maintaining for his benefit a pout that was less than half put on.

"As if you'd care a snap of those lovely fingers if I really were deceiving you!"

"You couldn't." Folly tossed her head. "I'm not quite simpleton enough to believe you mean anything you say to a woman, to any pretty woman, it doesn't matter who—"

"Now you *are* flattering me and no mistake." Mallison clapped on his topper, gave its crown an artful pat that adjusted it at the most killing angle, and managed a still more maddening smirk of complacence. "Believe you do care," he drawled . . .

"I care about having my party spoiled. Now Peter and Liane are going to run, too, and leave me all lonely and lorn."

Mallison laid hold of the knob and opened the door, but put his back to the edge of it and rested so, unaffectedly loath to forego the flirtation at its piquant stage of the present. His smile grew momentarily more personal and meaning; but some of its assurance

might have been make-believe, considering the nervousness he betrayed in Lanyard's sight (though not in Folly's, since she couldn't see them) by keeping his hands behind him and fiddling with the door-knob. An impudent nod designated the two who had been left in the dining-room.

"I'll come back, if you like . . . after they've blown . . ."

"Mally!" Folly drew back, flushing. "Don't be a silly fool, don't say things like that to make me angry. I oughtn't to overlook—"

Of a sudden Mallison stood away from the door, permitting it to shut itself gently, and caught the woman in his arms. "I mean it," he breathed ardently to Folly's hair, holding her fast in spite of a notable absence of effort to escape. "I'm mad about you, Folly, simply mad about you—and you know it, you wild, sweet witch!"

"I know you're mad now," the witch replied neither wildly nor sweetly. "I may have suspected it before, but this proves it. Please let me go."

"Not a chance," Mallison confidently laughed—"I've got you now where I've been wanting you, God knows how long! Folly dear: I'm simply desperate with love of you. Only say the word—I'll tell Mrs. Ashe where she can go, and be back here inside half an hour, or as soon as I'm sure Peter and Liane have left. Folly! be kind to me—"

"Mally!" The cry was keyed low yet tense with indignation. A sudden squirm broke his embrace. Folly stood back, fending the man off with a firm hand.

"Don't do that again, I won't have it. . . . How dare you say, or even suggest, such things to me? You know I don't care the least in the world for you. And even if I did . . . But I don't want to be unfair. You've had too much to drink tonight. Do go now, please, go right away, and don't come back till you're ready to beg my pardon."

"Oh!" The iced sincerity of the rebuff wiped away the self-confident smirk and set in its place a scowl of affronted self-esteem. "That's your style, is it, my lady? Virtue on a pedestal! And after the way you've led me on."

Folly held him briefly in a stare of incredulous disdain; her rush of colour slowly ebbing. A slight gesture sketched inability to understand the man, in a voice of reproach and regret she said quietly: "O Mally! how can you be so contemptible?"

The countenance of the dancing man grew darker still, his too-full lips took on an ugly contour beneath their closely-trimmed moustache of the mode. He seemed to contemplate, even with difficulty to refrain from uttering, some embittered and withering retort. Instead, he turned in dumb fury and flung out of the house. Thanks less to his temper and intention than to its automatic air-check the door closed without noise other than the click of its latch. And Folly gave herself a little shake of impatience and reasserted the wonted spirit of her countenance as she ran back to rejoin Pagan and Liane Delorme.

Their three voices were once more busy when Lan-
yard made his way back to the boudoir telephone and

took a long chance with it, communicating to the Central operator the number Crane had left with him. But the turn of his luck was such that, though the connection was established all but instantaneously, the masculine voice that answered was not the one he wanted to hear.

No: Mr. Crane wasn't in, and there was no telling when he would be in; maybe in ten minutes, maybe in ten days. But the voice was perfunctorily prepared to take any message that Lanyard might care to leave and see that it got into Crane's hands as soon as he did return, if ever.

"Tell him, please, Mr. Duchemin called him up." It was necessary to spell out that old alias which Crane could hardly have forgotten. "Say my business is urgent—Mr. Crane will understand."

"Want him to call y'up? What's yuh number?"

Without the least hesitation, in a single phrase Lanyard abolished the telephone installation at Folly McFee's: "Say there is no telephone. But give him, if you will be so good, this address." Lanyard detailed the number of the house and street and hung up. He had no fear that Crane would fail to draw an intelligent inference and guide himself by the light thereof. Nevertheless he would have been grateful for some assurance that Crane would get the message in good time. . . .

Back at the head of the stairs, he felt warranted in assuming that his daring with the telephone had not betrayed him. The hum of talk that rose from the diminished dinner party was constant, or punctuated

only by the laughter with which the two women encouraged Peter Pagan in his efforts to be funny. For all that, Lanyard escaped discovery by the narrowest of squeaks; for he stepped out into the hallway only to find that Mallison had let himself into the house again, and was furtively slinking up the stairs—was even then, indeed, half way up.

Driven back to the refuge of the clothes-press, Lanyard pulled its door into position in the same instant that saw Mallison skulk into the boudoir.

It appeared from this, then, that one had not erred in mistrusting the nervous hands of the dancing man as they had played with the knob—and one might no longer doubt, with the safety-catch as well—what time Mallison had delayed, posing with his back to the door and philandering with Folly.

IX

NEITHER might he who unsuspected spied, through the crack of a closet-door all but closed, on Mr. Mallison with many a gesture of quiet authority making himself at home in Folly's rooms, seriously question the presence of a practitioner adept in the grammar of second-storey work. Mallison's footfalls would not have ruffled the repose of an insomniac, the play of his hands was certain yet light as the flutter of butterfly wings; and what he had to do by way of making ready for what he purposed doing, he did with right professional economy of effort.

To begin with, he did nothing at all more than stand still in the middle of the boudoir and study with glances keen, direct and comprehensive what one guessed were surroundings not wholly strange to him. And seeing him thus with his guard down, naked of all his petty social airs and graces and that shining garment of conceit which clothed the man like a woven armour when he was self-conscious, the hidden watcher began to suspect that he might have erred in his first rating, that the Mallison now revealed was worthier to be reckoned with than he had guessed. The Mallison of this minute was nobody's fool, knew what he was about, and—or Lanyard read every surface sign awry—was dangerously capable of proving at need a disconcerting knowledge of how to take care of himself.

With a muted grunt of gratification in the sum of his survey, the man passed through to the bedchamber, wherein his manœuvres were less readily followed, since the mirror in the boudoir revealed to Lanyard only a narrow segment of the adjoining room. This comprehended, however, the head of Folly's bed, and the small table beside it from whose drawer Mallison removed a pretty trinket of a silver-plated, pearl-handled pistol, extracting its shells, thoughtfully putting them away in one of his waistcoat pockets, and finally replacing the weapon with nice precision where he had found it.

Content, it seemed, thus to have done his bit for preparedness, Mallison sauntered back to the boudoir, stripped off his top-coat, folded it with meticulous care and hid it, together with his hat, on the floor behind a capacious lounge chair.

Then consulting his watch and with a yawn politely shielded registering time to kill, he strolled over to the secretary and stooped to inspect, with a flickering, sly smile, the safe built into its base. The tip of a fingernail discreetly pried open the blind front, leaving no treacherous trace, but after a show of hesitation the man seemingly decided not to disturb the safe itself, and restored the front to its former position. Private papers, with which the pigeonholes of the secretary were well stocked, next drew his interest, and he was betraying a mean disposition to tamper with them when the chance discovery of a hand-mirror resting face up on Folly's blotting-book diverted Mallison with a temptation which he didn't even try to resist. And he had

finished disciplining an imperceptibly unruly eyebrow and had begun to practice a killing smile, an artful variation of the infallible gleam-of-teeth suite, when a bell grumbled vigorously in the bowels of the house and was interpreted as a signal for strict attention to business thenceforward.

Mallison went at once to the door to listen, an occupation in which he had the man in the clothes-press at a good disadvantage. The latter none the less contrived to infer from noises in the entrance-hall that Pagan's car had duly reported and that its owner and Liane were saying good-night. Then, as the rumor of their voices failed, Mallison re-crossed the boudoir with swift but silent tread and once more passed from Lanyard's range of vision. The latter, however, recalled having noticed a handsome, painted screen in that corner, and entertained no doubt but that Mallison was making himself small behind it.

To prove this guess well-grounded, Folly herself entered in another moment, and gave every evidence of being unaware of any alien presence as she faltered through the boudoir, casting discontented glances round as if in aimless search of something in the nature of a distraction. Unmistakably disappointed, and thereby the more frankly fretted, she drifted on to her bed-chamber, from whose unseen recesses her voice and her maid's were presently to be heard.

What they said was of no moment: their bedtime dialogue of every day, varied only by Folly's decision to stay up a while longer: she wasn't sleepy and had letters to write. So saying, she dismissed the maid

and sulkily trailed back into the boudoir, bringing a sizable case of tooled leather which held, one surmised, the jewellery she had worn at dinner, and which she proceeded to put away in the safe that deserved its style so little, but only as a matter of habit, demonstrating that all faith in the contraption was dead by not troubling to shut its door and set the lock.

In the pause that ensued, with a sigh of boredom Folly settled down in the chair before her secretary, and Lanyard ventured to widen the crack of the door a fraction.

The woman sat toying with a pen and more than half-turned away from this observer, charmingly posed with all the unconscious grace that was native to the sweetly fashioned body which her *négligé*, a sheer web of lace threaded with ribbon, made so bare a pretence of covering. A lamp on the secretary turned the tangle of her hair into a living nimbus and edged tenderly a neck and shoulders kissable in the sight of any man. Indeed, Mallison was hardly to be blamed . . .

Without making a sound he stole up behind the woman lost in thought, the fire of his lips on her flesh was the first that she knew of his presence. Crying out in alarm and anger, she started up to find herself in his arms.

"Hush, dear—please!" Mallison entreated, trying to insure her silence by resting fingers lightly upon her lips. "The servants might hear—"

"'Might'!" Folly stormed, jerking her head away—"they shall!"

If Mallison had counted on such toleration as she

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had shown him by the street door half an hour earlier, his lamentable error was made manifest to him without an instant's grace. Folly fought him like a miniature fury, and to such effect that she was free while her defiance was still an echo in the room—free and swelling her throat with a scream when he plunged upon his knees before her and threw wide arms of suppliance.

"Please, please!" he begged—"don't call for help. I'll do anything you say, promise to be good and go quietly when you choose to send me away—only, don't call your servants. Think what they'd think!"

"What's that to me?" Folly demanded. "What do I care what they think of you?"

"It's you I'm considering," the man protested—"it's what they'd think of you I'm worrying about. You can't imagine they'd give you the benefit of the doubt . . ."

"Benefit of what doubt?"

"Do you suppose they'd believe I ever found my way up here without your invitation?"

"Is a woman always suspected of enticing the man who breaks into her house like a thief? I'll risk that."

"No—for God's sake! wait, listen to me, Folly! I don't deserve to be thrown out, you owe me fairer treatment—"

"I owe you *what?*"

"You're a woman, not a school-girl—you know what you've been doing to me these last few weeks, you know you've driven me half out of my head flirting with me."

"Oh?" Sense of humour reasserted itself in a little laugh. "Why half?"

"Entirely, then," Mallison sullenly conceded. He got on his feet again, but his attitude remained conciliatory, even though he would persist in seeking to defend himself at her expense. "If it's insanity to love you, then I'm mad enough—but, God's my witness! I'm not altogether to blame. And you know that's true."

"And I'm to understand you stole back here tonight to tell me that?"

"No—but to beg your forgiveness for having acted as I did a while ago. I couldn't leave things as they were between us overnight, I couldn't think of anything but how unfair you were when I lost control of myself for just one little minute and made you see how madly I love you. I had to come back and have it out, explain—arrive at some sort of understanding."

"And you want me to believe you considered these your best overtures?" Folly uttered a cluck of contempt. "Before you go," she pursued, instinctively dragging across her bosom the inadequate protection of the *négligé*—"you might be good enough to explain how you did manage to sneak up here."

But Mallison merely uttered a sibilant "*Hush!*" and lifted a hand of warning.

Below, the grumble of the door-bell sounded with an accent imperative.

"What do you suppose that means?" the dancing man demanded in a whisper of apprehension.

"Somebody at the front door . . . How should I know?" The noise was repeated. A glint of distrust kindled in the woman's eyes. "What's the matter, Mally? Expecting somebody?"

"Nonsense. What a question! Who should I be expecting?"

"How do I know?"

"I was only startled . . ."

"Yes," Folly affirmed with tightened lips: "I noticed that."

A sudden confusion arose in the lower hallway, several people giving tongue all at once: evidently whoever it was that had answered the door had been instantly made the target of a storm of questions.

Folly's face showed a stamp of deepened misgivings and suspicion. "What on earth—!" she murmured.

Upon these words Mallison closed in on her again and made her captive in a tight embrace.

"What does it matter?" he insisted. "Stupid people bothering Soames: what do they matter to you and me? Folly, I love you, I'm mad—"

She was fighting wildly but impotently now, kicking, pommeling with fists that did no hurt, biting at the hand that closed her mouth. Downstairs the clamour rose to a higher pitch of angry disputation. Boldly Lanyard stepped out of concealment.

Neither Folly nor Mallison saw him till he caught the dancing man from behind, with calculated brutality broke the clasp of his arms round the woman's body, and sent him spinning and stumbling across the room to bring up against the further wall with a crash that started his eyes in their orbits.

The disturbance below by this time had attained the proportions of a small riot. There were scuffling feet on the stairs. Nearer at hand Folly was screaming.



A Columbia Pictures Corporation Production.

EVE BRIDGES A DIFFICULT SITUATION BY INTRODUCING LANYARD AS

"MY FRIEND MR. ANTHONY."

The Lone Wolf Returns.

To this Mallison added the snarl with which, recovering, he took the offensive in turn, launching himself at his assailant's throat in murderous fury. Unhappily enough for him, Lanyard had wanted nothing better. They closed, grappled, for a breath swayed as one. Then Mallison felt one of his arms being irresistibly wrenched out of its socket, and to such exquisite torture yielded, perforce turning his back to Lanyard, who held him so another instant, then without warning released him.

With the racket of argument, physical and vocal, now loud upon the very landing outside, Lanyard dared not be merciful or give Mallison any fighting chance. As the man whirled round to launch a new onslaught, Lanyard's fist carried every ounce of his weight and all his ill-will to the other's jaw. Lifted bodily by that terrific blow, Mallison crashed back across an occasional table, sweeping off and extinguishing a lamp, and collapsed, insensible, on the floor.

Simultaneously the door flung open and four people broke into the boudoir, a struggling knot that instantly resolved itself into its elements; the McFee butler, with coat half torn from his back, two strange men, one of rough-and-ready appearance, the other a type slightly more genteel, and a woman, a garish blonde of the synthetic school, with her hat over one ear.

The shaded light on the secretary alone remained to lend these several actors visibility. Lanyard stood squarely in front of it, his figure, to eyes new from the stronger illumination of the hall, hardly better than a silhouette. Folly, well out of harm's way on his one

hand, was less kindly shadowed, in view of the extreme candour of her déshabillé; Mallison, on the other, was screened from the invaders by the drop-leaf of the table behind which he had gone down.

Thus chance set the stage and lighted it for a twist in the action of the piece unforeseen even by its first player and collaborating dramatist. For the bottle-made blonde with hat askew needed only a glimpse of that tall, slender, and well-poised shape, bulking black against the glow, to hurl herself across the room, fall weeping upon Lanyard's bosom, and strain him passionately to the agitated abundance of her own.

"My husband!" she cried—"my husband! O Harry! how could you?"

And Lanyard suffered her.

X

HE was in no hurry, the truth would all too soon be her bitter medicine; if meantime to rest on him the burthen of her wrongs were any comfort to the lady, she was welcome. Still, he inclined to think it lamentable that he didn't know her well enough to reason with her in a friendly way about her taste in scent for the hair. Chivalry he reckoned a fine gesture but a bit dear at the cost of asphyxiation.

For all that, the longer this unhappy creature continued blind to her blunder, the better for Folly—for Michael Lanyard, too. He was far from enjoying any sort of confidence that the next blind turn of events would prosper his meddlesome hand; he was constrained by circumstance to count more heavily than he relished on the resilience of Folly's wits and their readiness to read his heart in respect of herself and play up to the cues which he must somehow manage to give her.

An anxious sidelong glance caught Folly thunder-struck and gaping, with eyes astart doubting their own dependability. The last man she had ever thought to see again, with his consent, and particularly beneath that roof, the alleged larcener of her emeralds last night, tonight figuring spontaneously in the dual rôle of knight errant and spouse recreant!

He saw her so, and knew very well it could hardly

tend but to make her bewilderment the thicker, yet an irrepressible devil of ribaldry in Lanyard prompted him to wag his head at Folly and make a comic mouth over the fair false limpet that had fastened to his bosom. Not a little to his surprise, more to his encouragement, a gleam of lively appreciation broke through the clouds of Folly's bemusement. But the limpet chose the selfsame moment to prove her protean versatility by shifting all at once into the guise of a shrew, thus rendering infeasible any further attempt to impart his mind to Folly through the medium of the eloquent eye.

Abruptly and with a clever effect of casting Lanyard off by main strength, the strange woman struck a florid pose with arm levelled and eyes ablaze.

"There!" she rasped—and Lanyard wondered could this possibly be the voice that had so lately cooed endearments by telephone—"there he is, gentlemen! there stands my husband, the dirty hound that leaves me to cry my heart out at home while he steps out with fast society dames, like that shameless, half-naked hussy there!"

The quivering index of denunciation picked out the shrinking shape of Folly in her informal attire, and the self-appointed censor paused to let this characterization bite deep. But when she offered to resume she half-choked instead because an unpresaged glare of ceiling lights, thoughtfully switched on by Soames, revealed to her not the hang-dog mask of Mallison but an utterly strange countenance whose graciousness was shaded by a problematical smile.

A brief seizure of speechlessness was shared by the woman's companions, and utilized by Lanyard to note the more salient features of the others, individually, against the chance of future need. There was no foretelling when some flash of temper might not precipitate a free-for-all of outcome highly dubious; it might be useful to be able to identify these precious impostors should ill-luck throw one in with them another time. Commonplace scamps he accounted them every one. Contempt for Morphew mounted; a scoundrel of really respectable calibre would have known better than to employ such cheap tools for even a simple job of villainy.

The woman was, or had been, a comely wench; but the strong light wasn't kind to her complexion, to such of it, that is, as she hadn't scrubbed off on Lanyard's waistcoat. Her skin roughed up through its thick wash of whiting and smears of carmine, skillfully painted contours failed to amend the viciousness of thin lips that dragged in their corners, more than belladonna and mascaro would be needed to restore the pristine charm of eyes grown hard with looking too long upon life stripped of all loveliness.

And the men seemed her well-suited associates: one, a thickset body whose eyes of a brute went forbiddingly with an undershot jaw, the other a figure of saturnine cast and seedy gentility set off by a cutaway coat and a standing collar slightly soiled.

Recognizing in neither of these a personality to call for the waste of two consecutive thoughts, Lanyard returned his attention to the woman, who recoiled a step

instinctively, as if afraid he meant to lay hold of her. "What!" she squawked in throaty disgust—"you ain't my husband!"

"Madame"—Lanyard did her a grave bow—"the misfortune is mutual."

"But where is he? Where's my husband?"

"Madame has mislaid one?"

The mock told, with a slack jaw and befogged eyes the woman fell back another pace. "I guess," she stammered, "there's some mistake . . ."

"The conjecture does madame's intelligence vast credit."

"It's Mr. Mallison she's after, sir." The butler Soames, schooled to view without any amazement the vagaries of a mad world of masters, and sensibly putting aside the immomentuous issue of his inability to account for Lanyard, addressed himself to this last as to his one intellectual peer of the time being. "They would 'ave it 'e was upstairs 'ere with Mrs. McFee, sir, and forced their way up in spite of all I could do."

"I quite understand, Soames—Mrs. McFee, too, I'm sure. You do understand, don't you, Mrs. McFee, this is no fault of Soames'?"

Folly shook herself together and vigorously nodded; but Lanyard coolly forestalled whatever words they were that troubled her lips.

"Mr. Mallison is no doubt madame's husband?" he challenged the blonde female. "She had some reason to think she would find him here?"

"Just a minute, Grace." The rusty genteel half of her supporting company, now that he pushed himself

forward, proved to possess a rather formidable manner, at once truculent and crafty. "Let me speak for you—"

"You have that right?" Lanyard with pointed civility enquired.

"I've been retained by Mrs. Mallison . . ." The fellow fished a *passée* professional card from a pocket and thrust it under Lanyard's nose. "I represent her in this case."

"Interesting—but perhaps irrelevant—if true. I mean to say"—Lanyard brushed the card aside, but not before his eye had caught the name *Hobart G. Howlin* in engraved script followed by the designation *Attorney-at-law*; and all at once he became as ugly as he had theretofore been bland—"what of it?"

"We were led to believe Mr. Mallison was here—"

"You call yourself a lawyer and pretend that gave you any right to violate the privacy of this household?"

"It sometimes becomes necessary for a wronged wife to take the law into her own hands."

"Mrs. Mallison has been wronged, then? How sad."

"Mrs. Mallison," her counsel persisted, but with shaken bravado—"happens to know her husband has been spending too much of his time of late in the society of Mrs. McFee."

"In brief: you have had the effrontery to force your way into a private residence in the hope of securing evidence for divorce proceedings?"

"You've got the idea."

"O insolent!" Folly flamed.

It was now again necessary for Lanyard firmly to put down interference, lest his diplomacy fail. "By your leave, Folly: permit me to deal with these gentry. Their account of themselves is much too ingenious to lose. If we let them rattle on—who knows?—we may learn something to their disadvantage."

At this the rogue of ruder mien concluded that he, for one, had had enough. "Come on," he mumbled, plucking at Howlin's sleeve: "le's get out o' this."

"Not so fast. You entered by force; you will leave in the good pleasure of Mrs. McFee. And then Mr. Mallison will go with you."

"What's that?" the lawyer demanded. "Mallison's *here?*"

"We have no wish to deceive you."

"But where?" the slighted wife shrilly objected. "I don't see him . . ."

"How little married folk ever know each other! The dear lad's so high-strung, when he heard you on the stairs he swooned away. Half a minute . . ."

Lanyard stepped behind the table to find Mallison in the first throes of coming to. An unceremonious hand twisted in his collar helped him find his feet. He swayed on them, glaring groggily round that ring of faces whose lips framed confounded murmurs, while Lanyard nodded politely to the confessed wife: "Permit me, Mrs. Mallison: your husband." More brusquely he added: "Now Soames: if you think you could find a policeman . . ."

The butler saluted this suggestion with unbegrudged

respect, but the man who had lately been so anxious to go now moved in haste to intercept him at the door.

"Here!" he growled in an effort, not too happy, to assert authority—"wait a minute, wait—a—minute, you! What's the grand idea?"

"What is your objection?" Lanyard countered.

"If you got any use for a cop, you don't have to look no farther. I'm a city detective."

"Splendid. You shall enjoy every opportunity to exercise the powers of your office. Nevertheless, Soames will proceed to fetch a policeman."

In a bluster of panic the self-styled detective elbowed the butler away from the door. "Wait, now! This is my job; if any pinchin's goin' to be done here to-night, I'll do it."

"To the contrary . . ." A hand slipped deftly beneath the skirts of Mallison's dinner-jacket brought to light an automatic pistol of whose presence on his person Lanyard had become aware in the course of their struggle. "To the contrary, you will be good enough to stand back and let Soames do my bidding. Do you hear? And all of you"—a push sent Mallison reeling drunkenly into the ranks of his confederates—"all four of you will be well advised to put up your hands."

Prompt and unanimous respect rewarded this good advice, even Mallison proving himself sufficiently recovered to heed.

"Cut along now Soames; and you might tell the policeman he will need a patrol wagon, with four prisoners to handle."

"Look here!" Mallison found his tongue in a splut-

ter of spite and fear—"you're going too far, Lanyard, carrying things with too high a hand—"

"I know but one way to deal with blackmailers."

"And what about yourself—you damn' burglar?"

A new voice introduced itself to the dialogue. "Blackmailers?" it drawled. "Burglar? Fightin' words, folks, fightin' words!"

Soames, moving to execute Lanyard's instructions, had opened the door to find it blocked by a long, loose-jointed body. Now, hands in pockets, hat well back on his head, chewing the unlighted cigar of his custom, the detective Crane, lounged in, with ironic glances reviewing the several countenances so variously coloured with emotion, until he perceived the presence of Mrs. McFee. Then he was quick to uncover his head and disembarass his teeth.

"Your servant, ma'm. Hope you'll excuse the informality, but we found your front door standing wide open and figured maybe something might be going wrong. H'are you, Lanyard? Business as usual, I see." A nod and wrinkling grin designated the pistol. "I'll tell anybody that don't know, you're the little guy that stages the quick come-backs." Over his shoulder, Crane called: "Come on in, Hoffmeyer; looks like we'd found us a regular job."

A brisk policeman in uniform moved in from the hallway. And sensible of sharp relief, Lanyard put down the pistol. "My friend!" he told Crane: "never in your life were you more welcome."

"That's easy to believe; going on the looks of things we've happened along at one of these psychological

moments, all right. No thanks to me, of course, Lanyard: I just naturally hiked right up here as soon as I got your 'phone message."

"You telephoned for Mr. Crane?" Folly demanded, eyeing Lanyard intently.

"He sure did," Crane affirmed.

"At what time?"

"Half an hour or so ago—wasn't it, Lanyard?"

"Approximately. But I can fix the hour precisely: Mrs. McFee will undoubtedly remember when Mallison was called from the table to answer the telephone." Folly nodded, her eyes growing rounder. Lanyard laughed, with a wave of a debonnaire hand introduced the other woman. "You see here the lady who was then, according to Mallison, Mrs. Stuyvesant Ashe. Now she accuses herself of being his wife. One or both of them would seem to be mistaken. No matter: after listening in on their conversation, I felt warranted in calling up Mr. Crane without waiting to secure your approval."

"You called him up from here?"

"But what would you?" With a specious show of naïveté Lanyard chose to misconstrue that almost purely rhetorical query of astonishment. "Admit that I had hardly time to run out and hunt up a sound-proof booth, madame, admit that I had no choice other than to remain here if I were to keep faith with you—and more especially when the telephone had just told me enough to prove that this fine gentleman intended blackmail, whether or not we were justified in crediting him with a graver offence against your hospitality."

The earnest eyes that held Folly's saw them confused by these cunningly sown hints and implications. And not until she had heard him out with a comprehending nod for all comment, and the lips that had been parted in breathless interest closed without uttering a word to refute his impudent assertion of an understanding which made Folly a party to his presence in the house, did Lanyard again find it easy to breathe. But that nod, coupled with her silence, testified to appreciation of the fact that in tacit confirmation of his claim lay the one sure way to save her good repute, that to gainsay him would be to lend colour to the calumny implicit in the intrusion of Mallison's "wife" and her accomplices.

If Folly wanted proof of this, she had it in another breath, when the seedy conspirator instituted a counter-offensive.

"Just a minute, gentlemen!" he insisted, pushing in his sallow, excited face between Lanyard and Crane. "You go too fast. We deny all these ridiculous allegations, but particularly we deny that my client is here in any sort of collusion with her husband. That malicious innuendo we flatly contradict and brand a lie out of whole cloth!"

"'We'?" Crane echoed, inquisitive but otherwise indifferently impressed. "Your 'client'?"

"I am counsel for Mrs. Mallison—"

"You don't say? Bet anything she deserves you, too." Crane showed Lanyard arched brows of dubiety. "Shyster?"

"Calls himself Howlin," Lanyard assented impa-

tiently. "If you like he'll show you a card almost as shady as the business which engages his talents tonight."

"I can afford to ignore slurs upon my professional standing which come from such a source," Howlin loftily retorted. "But my business tonight being the legitimate one of looking after the interests of a client, I can hardly be expected to stand by and enter no objection when I hear her slandered."

"I'll say you can't," Crane cruelly agreed, looking the lady up and down with a glance so discerning that it caused a dull flush to burn beneath her complexion.

But now again Howlin considered the source and concluded he could afford to ignore constructive sarcasm.

"Mr. Regan here," he said, introducing the man who had styled himself a "city detective"—"has under my direction been shadowing my client's husband for several weeks. His reports show there's a questionable degree of intimacy between Mallison and Mrs. McFee. When, therefore, Mallison was seen tonight letting himself into this house, using his own latch-key, we had every excuse for assuming that an unexpected visit would produce certain results. Now, however, since we would seem to have been misled, we can only offer Mrs. McFee the assurance that my client stands ready to give her every satisfaction the law may hold her entitled to. I think that's all . . ."

He turned confidently toward the door. "Now, Mrs. Mallison, if you're ready . . . Come, Regan."

"What's your hurry?" Crane genially wanted to

know, but quickly enough to anticipate the storm of words promised by Folly's violent start. "You admit your liability for unlawful trespass, I take it?"

"If Mrs. McFee thinks she can induce any court in the land to call it that," Howlin stipulated.

"Outside of that, however, you've got nothing to fear?"

Mr. Howlin achieved a shrug which utterly abolished a suggestion so absurd.

"Then be good sports—why don't you?—and stick around a while. Maybe you might be able to help us out in dealing with Mr. Mallison. Going on all you tell me, Mrs. Mallison don't owe him any good will; I judge she ought to be happy to see him come up with. How about it, ma'm?"

The person appealed to in a touching twitter looked to Howlin for guidance, and got from him a subtle sign which she may have misinterpreted; not without excuse, seeing that the situation was one of the extremest delicacy for all of them, and that the sacrifice of one to the salvation of the majority is a time-honoured expedient with her kind.

"Ask me anything you want," she volunteered, wagging an indignant head and giving Mallison a poisonous look . . . "after the way he's treated me, the low cur!"

"That's handsome of you, ma'm." Crane beamed benignantly upon the lady, and with little less warmth upon the unhappy dancing man. "I won't forget it, either. But first I'd like to ask Mr. Lanyard here a few questions, to sort of clear the ground."

"I object!" Mallison stuttered in dismay. "I refuse to submit to these star-chamber proceedings—"

"Do you, now?" Crane commented with much interest. "Well, if you ask me, 'star-chamber proceedings' is a mighty hifalutin' name for what's going to happen to you right here and now, my lad; it's going to be a whole lot more like the third degree, if you know what I mean."

Mallison knew only too well; fear lent those ingratiating eyes, usually so gentle beneath their long and silky lashes, the wickedness of a cornered rat's. "I protest!" he snarled—"I deny your right—"

"You better hush. Hoffmeyer here don't like your looks nohow, he'll admire to improve 'em if you don't quit speaking out of your turn."

Mallison got a black grin from the patrolman and subsided at discretion, while Crane cocked a meaning eye at Lanyard.

"Now, Mr. Lanyard, if you'll just tell us what you know about how this man Mallison comes to be here . . ."

"Gladly." Lanyard had his story pat, it fell from a glib tongue. "I presume everybody present knows Mrs. McFee's emeralds were stolen last night from the safe in that secretary over there, under circumstances which caused a certain person to be suspected—"

"Why so modest?" Mallison interrupted vindictively. "Why so mealy-mouthed? 'Suspected' is hardly the word."

"I am desolated to disappoint monsieur; unhappily

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or not, as you may care to take it, Mr. Crane was able to establish my innocence this morning."

"Like hell he was!"

"Just one more nasty crack out of you, Mallison," Crane advised, "and I'll let Hoffmeyer do your wife a swell favour."

"Strangely enough," Lanyard serenely pursued: "Mrs. McFee and I, thinking the case over independently, arrived at the same conclusion: that Mallison probably knew as much as anybody about the theft. Mrs. McFee accordingly laid a trap: invited him to a little dinner-party this evening, in the course of which she let it become known that the thief had overlooked a valuable lot of jewellery which she meant to leave unprotected tonight other than by the safe which had once already been attacked with success. This made a second visit probable, if there were grounds for our suspicions. . . . I on my part arranged to occupy that clothes-press which you see with its door open; by leaving the door just off the latch, it was easy to keep direct watch over the safe. Toward the end of dinner Mallison received the telephone call which has been mentioned, and used it as a pretext for leaving before the other guests. He said good night to Mrs. McFee at the front door, but as soon as she returned to the dining-room let himself back into the house and stole upstairs. He was hiding behind the screen in the corner when Mrs. McFee came up, but when she had put her remaining jewels in the safe and turned to go to her bedchamber, he blundered—made his presence known in a way she couldn't overlook. Then he tried

to overpower her, to prevent her giving the alarm. I was obliged to interfere and had just succeeded in discouraging him when these people broke in . . ."

"Straight enough story, far as it goes," Crane approved.

But Mallison dissented wildly: "A pack of lies from beginning to end!" he termed it. To which Lanyard replied, with nonchalance quite unfeigned, that if they doubted his word they might ask Mrs. McFee. Neither was his confidence misplaced: quietly the young woman affirmed the substantial truthfulness of the tissue of misrepresentation which he had woven so brazenly under her very eyes and for her benefit as much as for his own.

"But one thing I want settled at once," she declared: "These people say Mallison used a latch-key. I say he didn't—unless he has one he stole. If they're right, I want that key. If they're wrong, I want that proved for my own sake."

"Reasonable enough," Crane agreed. "How about it, Mallison? got a little key to give up?" The dancing man shook his head, mumbling a negative. "You can save yourself a heap of trouble by forking it over, you know."

"I tell you I haven't got any key!" Mallison insisted with what seemed extravagant passion, while Lanyard eyed him in deepening perplexity: some secret fear, inexplicable, unwarranted by known circumstances, seemed to be at work in the man, desperation was glimpsing in his hunted eyes. "Mrs. McFee knows I haven't—I won't be sacrificed to save her—"

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"How's that?"

"Mrs. McFee," Mallison defiantly affirmed, "knows damn' well I haven't got a key and never had one, she knows damn' well she left the door fixed for me, so that I could reopen it by simply turning the knob from the outside——"

"Oh!" Folly gasped, infuriated—"what a contemptible lie! Search him, Mr. Crane—I demand that this beast be searched and proved a liar. He must have had a key, he couldn't possibly have got in any other way."

Even while she was speaking events got in motion, not consecutively but all at once: Mallison, stung to frenzy by his fears, whirled on a heel and made a mad dash for the passage leading to the bedchamber. A sinewy hand at the end of one of Crane's long arms shot out, with surprising readiness, to clamp upon his shoulder and drag him back. He turned and fought wildly. The policeman, Hoffmeyer, cheerfully waded in to lend Crane needed assistance. Mrs. Mallison and Messrs. Howlin and Regan thought to profit by the general preoccupation, but were painfully surprised to discover that Lanyard, an instant since a dozen feet away, was now planted firmly in front of the hall door and smiling a bright, bland smile over the sinister grin of Mallison's pistol.

They stopped. Simultaneously Mallison found himself helpless in an embrace which Hoffmeyer had fastened round him from behind.

"Cut it out, now!" the patrolman growled. "You kick my shins again, and I'll shake every tooth out of your fool head!"

Panting and twitching like a whipped animal, Mallison gave in, and with eyes of blank hopelessness followed the work of Crane's clever hands as they turned out the contents of his pockets, one by one, and neatly arranged their plunder on the top of the occasional table; bringing to light, in addition to everyman's horde of minor personal effects, a flat leather case which fitted neatly a lining pocket in Mallison's dress waistcoat and which held a light jointed jimmy of the toughest procurable steel with an assortment of skeleton keys designed to make the most modern of door-locks tamely yield up its secret.

Mallison's countenance gave open confession of abandonment to despair when this damning find was made; yet Crane was not half-finished with him. The next plunge of his fingers fished a tissue-paper packet from a lower waistcoat pocket, which, being unfolded, disclosed the purloined emeralds of Folly McFee.

Crane clucked in astonishment, Folly gave an incredulous squeal of joy, Lanyard a graphic start and stare. The others present reacted variously, each according to his idiosyncrasy. Only Mallison made neither sound nor stir. But the eyes he turned toward Lanyard were a murderer's . . .

XI

“**P**RETTY!” The chuckle with which Crane let that priceless hoard cascade, clashing, a stream of baleful green fire, into the cupped, eager hands of its owner, ended the hush which had spellbound the assorted actors. “Me,” he pursued in high contentment, “I’m *convinced!* Now if you’ll slip your wrist-warmers on our little friend here, the dancing yegg, we’ll blow, Hoffmeyer . . . But le’s see: I guess Mrs. McFee would just as leave not treat the neighbours to the sight of a patrol wagon boiling up to her front door at this time of night to cart this gay bunch away—it might look sort of funny. So, if it’s all right with you, ma’m, I’ll just get your butler to breeze out and rustle a brace of taxis. And then, folks”—his tolerant regard embraced Mallison, his soi-distant wife, her counsel, and the disgusted collaborator of this last—“we’ll all go riding round to the House with the Green Lamps in East Fifty-first.”

Neither did argument, expostulation, abuse, and threats more or less unveiled budge him from adherence to this programme, to which one prisoner alone entered no objection: in disgrace with Fortune, Mallison demonstrated at least the wit of silence. Nothing he said was ever to be used against him at his trial, for he said nothing. What, indeed (he must have

reasoned) was the use? What possible profit to him could accrue through his protesting that the case against him was a "frame-up," that Lanyard must wickedly have made him an involuntary receiver of stolen goods at some time during their struggle? The other contents of his pockets provided evidence too ruinous as to his character and secret shop to give such a claim a ghost of a show of winning evidence.

So Mallison submitted without any murmur; but the attention with which he enveloped Lanyard to the last left that one in no doubt as to his mind; and one less self-reliant might well have trembled to think that next morning at latest would see the man free, "out on bail," with every facility at his command to further plans for vengeance—else one had either overrated the power and prestige of Morphew or wronged that one in crediting him to Mallison in the rôle of patron.

The beck of Folly's head was brusque in deference to which Lanyard found himself finally closeted with her alone in her study, the temper in which she shut the door was openly one of direct impatience, his most disarming smile was wasted on the face she showed him, with its lips taut, brows level, and eyes uncompromising. To the "Well?" with which she chose to prompt him in a voice too cool for comfort, Lanyard returned a deprecating shrug.

"Well enough thus far, if you like; but this is far from the end. . . . I wonder, is it waste of time to beg a service of you, madame?"

The even brows contracted, his impudence earned the blank demur: "I don't know whether I ought!"

"After all," he submitted, "madame again has her emeralds . . ."

"And you to thank—I know. But still—I"

"And she retains that intangible something which is worth nothing till it is lost, I refer to her—as we absurdly say—good name."

"Haven't I proved my appreciation by letting you lie like a . . ."

Folly faltered, at loss for a figure, and Laynard gravely suggested: "Like—I trust very truly—a gentleman."

"Well!" The efforts failed that she had been making to re-establish that poise of impartiality which he had already shaken, she twinkled outright. "And I loved you for it and lied like a baggage in your support. Still, I think you owe me something more . . ."

"The explanation which I am as ready to make as you are to hear it, but a strange story—"

"I can imagine."

"Forgive me if I doubt that . . . A story so strange it will hardly seem credible without the testimony of one little likely to be suspected of bias in my favour, I mean Monsieur Morphew—"

"Morphew!"

Lanyard pretended not to know he had managed to stagger her a second time: "If you would be so gracious as to telephone the good man—one assumes you know his number—"

"But Morphy's *never* at home in the evening."

"Nevertheless I venture to prophesy he will be found at home this evening, and not far from the tele-

phone, either—providing you call him without too much delay.”

“Morphew?” Folly re-echoed as if she mistrusted her ears.

“You are such great friends, he won’t think it strange if you turn to him for friendly offices in your distress—”

“But I’m not in any distress.”

“Precisely there is the favour I would beg of you, madame; to make believe you are, to tell Monsieur Morphew that something so disturbing has just happened, you can not rest without his advice. If you will do that, I think you will find him more than willing to oblige you, to wait on you here with all possible expedition.”

“But what on earth—!”

“That I will make clear when you have telephoned. If you put it off until the Mallison lot is permitted to call in counsel and arrange for bondsmen, you won’t catch Monsieur Morphew at home.”

Lanyard endured gracefully the probe of mistrustful eyes, only a whimsical twitch of lips reminded Folly at length of his exemplary patience; whereupon she did a good descriptive bit with pretty shoulders and plumped herself down at the telephone.

Committing to memory the number she gave the Central operator, Lanyard saw the woman start when the voice that responded bore out his prediction that Morphew would be found anomalously at home, this night of all nights. But the ability of an excellent amateur actress which Folly had once before proved

to Lanyard's delight this time again stood her in good stead, he was fain to admit he himself might have been taken in by the ring of sincerity in her tremulous accents.

"Is that you, *really*, Morphy? Oh, I'm so glad! . . . Something terrible has happened, Morphy. Please don't ask questions now, I don't want to talk about it over the wire; but if you can possibly spare a minute, come around and give me your advice. You're the wisest man I know, and I'm in a peck of trouble, half out of my mind with worry . . . How perfectly sweet of you! Yes: as soon as you can, I'll be waiting so anxiously . . ."

Without rising, Folly swung round and mutely challenged Lanyard to make good his promise. But he merely bowed the bow that signifies "Thank you very much."

"Morphy says he'll come this minute."

"Figure to yourself, madame, one can with difficulty constrain oneself to wait."

"That's no fair." Folly got up with a flounce. "You're not telling me anything."

"There is so little time—and one feels sure madame will need all of it if she means to remedy what one may, without intending an impertinence, be permitted to term the quite too delightful unconventionality of her attire."

Not in the least displeased, Folly demanded: "Are you complaining—?"

"I am seeking delicately to suggest it would be a pity to give Monsieur Morphew any excuse for jump-

ing at a conclusion which, however flattering to my unworthy self, might prove difficult to correct, not to say painful . . .”

“Painful?”

“To him.”

“But you aren’t a bit fair, you know, to keep on making me like you when you know very well you haven’t been playing the game.”

“Madame wrongs me: one can play only such cards as chance deals to one’s hand.”

“O dear!” Folly sighed. “I’m afraid I’m too impressionable, or I’d never trust you at all, with appearances so black for you.”

“Innocence,” he modestly opined, “is so shining a garment, black appearances can only lend it an enhancing background.” She wavered between a smile and a frown. “But you have trusted me so far”—judging the moment ripe, Lanyard passed from trifling to earnest entreaty—“surely you can afford to trust me still farther. I want you out of the way when Soames shows Morpew in—let him say you will be down directly, nothing more—I want Morpew to meet me alone and without any warning. On the other hand, I wish you to hear every word that passes; so all that seems mysterious now will be made clear. While Morpew is busy trying to dissemble his joy at meeting me so unexpectedly, you will be able to come downstairs without making too much noise—”

“You aren’t suggesting that I eavesdrop—!”

“Why not? I did as much for you an hour ago—and very much to your advantage, you’ll agree. Take

my word for it, in this instance you will have even more excuse . . .”

“Heaven knows how you always manage to get round me, but you do.” Folly went to the door, but there paused, looking back over her shoulder with provocative eyes, pretty to death as she stood with head perked pertly, her dainty body less hidden than set off by its frothy déshabillé. “And it’s well for me, I’m afraid,” she confided, “if its true, as Liane says, you’re madly in love with another woman!”

She vanished, was heard briefly conferring with the butler in the entrance hall, then scampering up the stairs.

“And well for me!” Lanyard admitted then, with a wry grimace of self-knowledge; and forthwith closed his mind to the troubling concept of Folly as a woman too kindly inclined, a thought it wouldn’t do to dally with for weightier reasons than that it was the truth Liane had babbled.

Against this impending interview of precarious issue he had to make all his dispositions, mental and environmental, in minutes of grace he had no means of knowing how few. Everything depended on how soon Morphew might leave his quarters in response to Folly’s call, on whether or not he would learn before leaving of the reverse which had waited on the Mallison coup. Lanyard asked no longer odds than to have Morphew arrive uninformed and unsuspecting; if he didn’t, Lanyard would need to mind his eye, likewise his step, if he meant to go on living . . .

Swift review of four walls and all they enclosed

made careful note of the heavier articles of furniture and their arrangement in respect of one another and even more particularly of the four exits: the door to the entrance hall, the draped opening that communicated with the drawing-room, the two French windows that gave on the roof of the extension.

Wall-sconces with shields of painted parchment bathed the study in a glareless glow; these darkened, a shaded table lamp was left for all illumination. And this in its turn having been extinguished, it was feasible to reconnoitre at the windows without risking detection by any spy who might be stationed in the vacant land back of the house. But when Lanyard had gently parted the draperies and put his nose to a pane, his vision spent itself fruitlessly on the welter of blacks, from dense to dusky, that blotted out the kitchen-yard within its wooden walls and the open foundation pit beyond. Footfarers on the sidewalks to the north were well-defined by the bleak shine of a street light on the Lexington avenue corner; but if any living thing lurked in the waste between it was lost to the cunning of Lanyard's eyes.

Notwithstanding, he watched on, to make sure the avenues of escape were not stealthily picketed in advance of Morpheus's call, till the house-bell dictated retreat from the window to relight the table lamp and take the place and pose which Lanyard most fancied, in an easy chair screened from the hall by the door that opened inward.

The professional soft-shoes of the butler padded from pantry to front door, bolts thumped, the latch

rattled, Morphew was heard to salute Soames with gruff condescension, the colourless voice of the servant responded: and having surrendered his hat and coat, the Sultan of Loot paraded into the study with a strut (or the observation of his audience erred) coloured by a lively sense of gratification in unction yet to come. With Folly netted in his toils—no mistake about it, Morphew in this moment was on the best of terms with the business of life in a richly rewarding world. And viewing the man revealed in this humour, Lanyard ceased to entertain a doubt as to the best course to take with him.

Near the table whose lamp painted with stagey shadows his pale and crudely modelled features, Morphew halted. He cleared his throat importantly, consulted his watch, pricked an ear impatient for Folly's footfalls on the stairs, frowned ever so slightly over failure to hear them and, tickled by some furtive thought, flashed his rare, unholy smile. Then becoming cognizant of Lanyard sitting quietly in his corner, watchfully waiting, the man all at once grew taut in body and limb, like a dog confronted by some sudden shape of danger, and wiped his countenance clean of every treacherous trace of legibility. This much, and the swift veer of his eyes toward the doorway, alone confessed the facer to his expectations. The blinkless gaze that steadied to Lanyard's told nothing. Neither did it put any question. Pending the first move, which he was plainly resolved Lanyard must make, Morphew constrained himself to a set of dull, impassive patience.

An attitude Lanyard was nothing loath to humour.

If the enemy preferred to resign the initiative, he didn't mind. If it came to that, he had meant all along, if it should appear, as now it did, that Morphew hadn't as yet heard what had happened in the last hour, to force the fighting. He got up and performed his courtliest bow.

"Good evening, monsieur. It was gracious of you to come round so promptly. Won't you be seated."

Morphew ignored the gesture that singled out a chair for him, but after a measured instant observed rather than asked: "You were expecting me . . ."

"It was even I who advised Mrs. McFee to call monsieur into consultation."

The full, hard lips grudgingly released the monosyllable: "Why?"

"It recommended itself as the simplest way to seduce you into a conversation which I meant to have before morning whether you wanted it or not; furthermore, for me, by far the safest. Figure to yourself how much more secure I feel in my skin, meeting you here, the last place where you would have thought to find me . . ."

Morphew shifted slightly toward the door, a movement of impulse which he seemed to repent when he found Lanyard in the way. "I came here to have a talk with Mrs. McFee," he heavily stated, "at her invitation . . ."

"I have begged her to grant me the favour of a few minutes alone with you."

"I've nothing to say to you . . ."

"That places one of us at a deplorable disadvantage;

for I have much to say to you, monsieur, and mean to say it."

"Suppose I don't care to listen . . ."

"It desolates me to feel obliged to inform you that, entirely by chance and contrary to my preference and habit, I happen to be armed."

"Seems to me I've heard"—a slow sneer darkened the face of uncouth ugliness—"it used to be your boast, 'The Lone Wolf never kills'."

"Monsieur says truly 'it used to be' . . . He will, moreover, wisely remind himself that the Lone Wolf is no more, his code, such as it was, is no sure guide to what Michael Lanyard may do when he fights for the right to live his own life in his own way."

Another instant their glances clashed, then Morphey's fell, he turned sullenly back to the table, fumbling, to cover nervousness out of character, for his cigar-case. "Well: what do you want?"

Lanyard pushed the hall door to before replying.

"First, to give myself the felicity of telling you the great news."

Eyes beneath leaden lids shifted back to Lanyard's face, a gross hand grossly crusted with diamonds brought to light a case of gold studded with diamonds, but delayed to open it.

"Come, Monsieur Morphey! confess you are wondering what has become of that zealous disciple of yours, Monsieur Mallison."

"What about Mallison?"

But Morphey had found it necessary to moisten his lips before he could speak.

"He is, at the present moment, one has good reason to believe, wildly telephoning about Town to get in touch with you and pray for a bondsman to bail him out, when he is arraigned tomorrow morning for stealing Mrs. McFee's emeralds."

The pupils of the little, flesh-embedded eyes contracted, Morpew licked his lips again. "How's that?"

"Your protégé, monsieur, so neatly styled the dancing yegg, was caught hiding in the boudoir upstairs, some fifteen or twenty minutes ago, and arrested."

Morpew gave himself time to assimilate this ill-omened information, bending over the gaudy trinket in his hands and making meticulous choice of a cigar. He gnawed off its end, broadcasted the waste, put the case away, struck a match, and through a screen of smoke and flame looked back to Laynard.

"How'd you manage that?"

"But surely one who couldn't—so simple a matter!—is not one to have been honoured with the handsome offer you made me last night."

"I've put you a question," Morpew testily prompted; "I want to know how you managed to put it over on Mally. Afraid to answer?"

"All in good time. For the present, I have the whim to point out what dismal stupidity you have displayed in this affair, to the end that you may spare yourself further discomfiture by foregoing any injudicious schemes of vengeance which may be brewing behind that broad, impassive brow."

"You swing a mean tongue in English," Morpew observed—"for a foreigner." He cast about for a

chair sturdy enough to sustain the bulk of him, and with an air of resignation, his first voluntary confession of feeling, sat down. "Go on, get it all off your chest; I don't mind listening."

"Monsieur is too amiable. One can only prove one's appreciation by endeavouring to be brief . . ."

"Take your time. I got plenty."

"Regard, then, my good Morphew, that last night, in this room, I was drugged."

"Hootch?" Morphew sagely queried, and receiving a nod commented: "There's a lot of wicked stuff being served nowadays."

"Four drinks were mixed for us last night, Morphew, by your man Pagan. The other three were consumed without ill effects. Thirty minutes after drinking mine, I became unconscious of my actions."

"Never knew a Frenchman yet could hold his liquor like a gentleman."

"No doubt monsieur knows best how a gentleman drinks . . . At the same time, Pagan did his best, by means of hints thinly veiled, to prepare Mrs. McFee to credit me with the robbery which was even then planned in detail."

"Is this a confession you're making?"

"Planned by you, monsieur, and brilliantly executed by your henchman, the dancing yegg."

"If you didn't know what you were doing last night, like you claim, how d'you know you didn't pull the job off yourself?"

"One was waiting for that question, one knew it was sure to come after the preparation Pagan had made for it."

"I notice you don't seem in any sweat to answer it."

"It has been answered for me. With her complaint of the theft, Mrs. McFee communicated to the police the suspicions Pagan had been at such pains to sow in her mind; with the result that my rooms were visited early today and, like me, searched while I slept."

Morphew took the cigar from between his teeth and with an air of anxiety inspected its half-inch or more of ash. "And nothing found," he incuriously inferred.

"Nothing."

"Can't remember what you did with the stuff, either, I suppose?" The cigar went back to its appointed berth. "Too bad. You must've been stewed as a boiled owl, all right."

"Patience. Tonight, when Mrs. McFee called in the police to arrest Mallison for having sneaked back like the thief he is, after leaving this house in the character of a guest and friend, he was searched and found to possess"—Lanyard made provokingly deliberate pause—"a pocket kit of burglar's tools."

"Sounds fishy." Nevertheless, more business with the cigar told of strain to keep up appearances under unrelenting study. "That all your news?"

"But by no means all. Further search proved that Mallison had been guilty of the amazing indiscretion of bringing the emeralds, concealed upon his person, back into the house from which he had stolen them."

Untouched by Morphew's hand the cigar between his teeth dropped its ash. "How do you mean?" he mumbled, watching his fat bedizened fingers brush gray flakes from the lapel of his dinner jacket. "The

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emeralds couldn't have been found on Mally unless"—the colourless eyes lifted to Lanyard's face—"unless you put them there!"

"My gifts are small, I am hardly so clever as monsieur flatters me by supposing."

"By God!" Morphew heaved out of his chair in a cold rage of conviction—"you planted the stuff on the boy!"

"But," Lanyard pointed out, his suavity unruffled—"if you are so positive the emeralds were in my possession before they were found on Mallison, the admission is implicit that you had compromising knowledge of the robbery. Else how can you be so sure?"

"I'm satisfied you stole 'em," Morphew growled—"I'm satisfied you planted 'em on Mally for fear they'd be found on you."

"But why?" Lanyard argued as one perplexed but reasonable. "Have you never been mistaken in reading the hearts of those whom you employ? Remember what you must have known about Mallison before you reckoned him skillful and unscrupulous enough to be of use to you. Was it altogether wise, do you think, to trust such a one to resist the temptation to keep for himself the plunder you had set him to steal and bestow on me for my undoing? Was it wise to forget the least miscarriage of the scheme would leave you unable to prove your tool had been false to your trust? Was it wise to believe Mallison too dense to think of that for himself? How can you be sure he didn't put the jewels into his own pocket instead of into mine?"

"See here—!" Morpew stammered, equanimity at last shattered beyond dissembling.

"Ah! but there I have you," Lanyard chuckled. "There I touched the heel of Achilles—eh, monsieur?—your vulnerable spot! The truth is, you dare trust nobody; you don't know that Mallison didn't play you false, any more than you know now he won't, when the pinch comes, turn State's evidence and betray you to save himself."

"Get out of my way!" Morpew bit through his cigar and cast it from him with a violent hand. "I've had enough of this, I've stood for about all of your damned nonsense—"

"By all means, monsieur"—Lanyard politely stood clear of the door—"hasten to the police station and put the fear of God into the heart of this poor thing whom you were ass enough to trust. You haven't a minute to lose if you hope to succeed in stopping the mouths of those four whom the police are even now, doubtless, putting through the third degree—"

"Four?" Morpew checked short in ponderous dismay, his heavy head low between his shoulders and swaying like that of a tormented animal. "Four!"

"Bless my soul! did I forget to tell you? How unpardonably stupid of me. The lady so lost to shame that she openly accuses herself of being Mrs. Mallison, the enterprising Mr. Howlin, and his associate Mr. Regan—all stepped with Mallison into the trap you'd set for Mrs. McFee, for purposes of blackmail, and sprung it on themselves. If you doubt my word, you'll find them all at the East Fifty-first Street Police Station."

"If that's true," Morpew rumbled, barely articulate—"if I owe that to you, Lanyard—"

"It is—you do."

"You'll settle with me, you crook—if you hide at the ends of the earth, I'll find you and break you—"

"Ah! thanks, my good Morpew, many thanks!" Lanyard laughed in high delight. "How generously you play into my hands. You confess you employed Pagan to drug me and Mallison to commit a burglary in an attempt to fasten the crime on me—you own your complicity in an even fouler job of blackmail 'framed,' as you would say, for Mrs. McFee—and now you add the cap-stone!"

Lanyard checked, then called: "Are you there, Mrs. McFee?"

The portieres parted that closed the doorway to the drawing-room, Folly entered and halted, her slight figure now decorously clothed but drawn up to the full of its inches and from the crown of the dainty head to the tips of silken slippers tense with contempt from whose fire, ablaze in her eyes, Morpew had the grace to flinch.

"And now, before this witness," Lanyard pursued, "you add a threat against my life. It's more than I hoped for, Morpew, all I need to insure me a sound night's sleep. If I don't wake up from it unharmed, Mrs. McFee will know what to do. Must you go? Soames, no doubt, is waiting to show you out. But if you'd rather I gave you a lift with my foot—"

Morpew gave an incoherent bellow, lunged blindly

to the door, threw it open and himself through to the hall. The very floor of the house quaked with the pounding of his feet as he stampeded for open air. The street door banged like thunder while Lanyard stood laughing into Folly's eyes.

XII

BUT Lanyard was one who had learned how to laugh without losing sight of graver matters; the surface of his mood alone chimed with Folly's delight in the confusion he had meted out to Morphew, his thoughts were all a-ferment with perception of the worth of every instant lost to his first duty, which was straightway to put himself beyond the range of Morphew's exacerbated spite.

Yet he was hardly so engrossed with the more serious as to be blind to his closer peril, the glow that warmed Folly's countenance for him beneath the bright ripples of her glee; and in its unmistakable kindness read but one more reason why he must let nothing stand in the way of his prompt going.

The thought took him quickly to the table; he was lifting a hand to the switch of the lamp when Folly caught his arm, her two hands staying him with a gesture as gentle and importunate as the clasp of tendrils.

"You're wonderful!" she declared in a breath, looking up with eyes from which mirth had been swift to ebb—"marvellous, the way you managed him, twisted him round your little finger, made him own up to everything! And I'd always considered Morphy a sort of superman, so wise and calm and strong."

"Never reproach yourself with that," Lanyard replied with a twinkle. "I too was taken in, till he made it worth my while to call his bluff. But we mustn't forget all men are much alike: only so long as he fails to find a way to call mine will Morphey respect me. My one hope is to keep him at a distance—how do you say, over here?—to keep him guessing."

But the young woman wasn't so cheaply to be cheated out of her new-found luxury of hero-worship, the bright head dissented vigorously. "Why, Morphy hasn't a chance! you're equal to a dozen of him any day—and as many more Mallisons and Peter Pagans thrown in for good measure. Don't I know? Haven't you proved it here tonight?"

"The night is still young," Lanyard gravely reminded her. "It may tell another tale, if Morphey's crew can contrive to lay hands on me before morning."

"After he'd threatened you in front of me? Nonsense: he simply wouldn't dare—just as you told him."

"My bluff. Not that I mean to give him any opportunity to prove it such. But I shall need to move quickly, none the less . . ."

The hint he gave of a desire to be free of her hands got little encouragement, indeed their hold tightened while she mocked his professions with looks of disturbing admiration and derisive lips: "You're not afraid!"

"But I assure you I am profoundly afraid. I don't say Morphey would be flattered, but I fancy he'd feel far less a fool if he knew how thoroughly I am afraid of him. For we may be sure of one thing: in the

event of my becoming an early victim of some curious accident, Morphey's hand will never show. He's not the thundering scoundrel I thought him, but he's far too clever notwithstanding to order a misfortune for me that could possibly be traced to his management. So you see—with permission—I really must be going."

"But where, to be safe—?"

Lanyard's expression took on another shade of patience. "Time enough to think about that after I've called at my rooms to collect some belongings."

"But"—Folly held fast to his arm, with a little frown of solicitude to excuse her persistence—"if you feel so sure Morphey means mischief—"

"Do you need more proof than you've had tonight?"

"Then surely he'll have set somebody to watch the house already—"

"The front of it, yes. Precisely why I'm anxious to get away before he can set spies to guard the rear. If you have no objection, I shall leave by these windows after putting out the lamp."

"But why?" Folly adorably pouted. "You're safe enough here."

"Madame will forgive if I make so bold as to question that." She let fall her lovely lashes to deny Lanyard's meaning smile, but still held on. "And every minute I linger makes the danger outside more real."

"Then . . . don't leave at all . . ."

"Madame is generous to a fault. She forgets the world is never broad-minded. There are the servants to be considered, the neighbours—"

"A lot I care what people think, it's you I'm thinking of!"

Suffused with facile sentiment, the face at Lanyard's shoulder was that of an exquisite and ingenuous child, vibrant with glad recognition of a world whose wonder and beauty had till that moment been all unsuspected. And the worst of it was, she knew it . . . No: the real worst of it was that it wasn't art, it wasn't put on, she wasn't coquetting, actually she was stirred to the depths of her being and meant with all of her every lovely nuance of her looks. Even Lanyard knew an instant when nothing in life seemed more desirable than those lambent eyes and the yielding mouth whose lips trembled with her hastened breathing. . . .

But an instant only; in another he got himself in hand again and steeled his heart to cruel kindness. It went against nature to hurt her; but the hurt would not bite deep, its tonic pang would leave no scar. Not for the first time did life now give him proof of the readiness of a nature emotionally shallow and impressionable to succumb to the glamour of his ill-fame as a romantic rogue.

"Madame," said he with genuine reluctance, "would be so much wiser to think first of herself always."

She argued with a rebellious face: "But I can't help it—can I?—if it's you I must think of first."

"Nor can I help it," he gently said, "if I must always think first of another."

Folly caught her breath with a sharp little hiss, released Lanyard's arm and stood away, colouring but—strangely enough—not in anger.

"Oh!" she cried; and added with a half-smile of whimsical self-reproach—"I'd forgotten. So it's true, what Liane told me." She accepted a slow inclination of Lanyard's head, gave a small wistful sigh. "I suppose she must be very beautiful. . . . Won't you tell me what she is like?"

"Some day, perhaps," Lanyard vaguely agreed . . . "if you let me live to see another."

"I!"

"There's practically no danger if I may be permitted to say good night without more delay."

"I presume you must . . ." Folly wagged her head, with a smile that broke in ruefulness but radiated in unaffected amusement at her own expense. "What a silly you must think me, a sentimental little ninny! No: don't deny it, because you're quite right. So that's that—and what must be, must. Many thanks for my emeralds, Monsieur the Lone Wolf, and"—she dropped him a mischievous courtesy—"more for my lesson. And so—good bye!"

He waited with intention till, in a gesture of charming petulance, a hand fluttered into his.

"Good night, my dear," Folly tenderly murmured as he bent his lips to her hand—"good bye!"

Straightening up, Lanyard turned off the light.

XIII

SOME time after four o'clock the brougham, curbed overlong to pace sedately the interlacing mazes of the Bronx, gave a little start and shudder of pleasure to find itself at last heading into open country, with a soft deep purr crescendo flirted the dust of White Plains from its tyres and sped away, ventre-à-terre, upon the highway which, skirting the eastern shores of the Kensico Reservoir, wanders with such a luring random air the lake country of Westchester.

That day, true to the type of those that render Autumn in the Northern states the fairest season of the four, had been luminous of sky and languorous with reminiscent warmth. But now—as in a field of pastel tinting ineffably pellucid its sun dipped low to hills whose shadows like vast purple wraiths crept sluggishly across the valleys and their embayed waters, small lakes as still and bright and bleakly blue as plaques of polished steel——now as the dim haze of Indian Summer took on shades of lavender ever deeper and more tender, blotted up all distances and robbed the wooded hillsides of their flaming splendour—premonitions of evening chill lent tang to air aromatic with incense of dead leaves a-smoulder in uncounted pyres.

Lanyard leaned forward and offered to put up the windows at the chauffeur's back, but Eve de Montalais

gave a slight sign of dissent. "I like it better so, I love this air—if it's not too cold for you, my Michael."

He smiled a negative, and taking the rug from its rail made her snug in it. She lifted her eyes to his in lovely acknowledgement and, emboldened by the closing dusk and the loneliness of that little-travelled way, nestled nearer, cheek to his shoulder.

Thus, pensive with the gentle melancholy distilled by that hour of dying beauty, symbolic of the cruel haste with which all beauty passes, the lovers sat a while in silence; as, for that matter, they had, barring a few brief interludes of gossip upon indifferent topics, ever since leaving New York; not that either had too little to say . . .

"Michael: tell me you are happy."

He had to bend his head to hear that whisper, her lips brushed his cheek with a caress so fugitive and light they might have been a moth's fluttering wings.

"Never so happy, Eve."

"Tell me it shall be always so with us. Surely we can make it so . . ."

For all answer she had the tightened pressure of his arm; and, a little chilled with disappointment, she said no more till, after several minutes, Lanyard was moved to wonder aloud: "This country is all strange to my eyes. Where are you taking me?"

"To a far-away place I hope you'll like."

"How should I not, seeing it is your choice?"

"A little old inn, Michael, tucked away in the loneliest hills. We can be quiet there, and talk."

"Talk?" Lanyard made a sad stab at humour, hop-

ing thereby to divert her. "Is it kind to encourage my besetting vice?"

"I think," Eve answered, "you have something to tell me tonight."

"But you know it already," he parried poorly in his disquietude—"I think you have heard too often what I have to tell you."

As if he hadn't spoken, as if involuntarily giving her heart voice, in a tone curiously dispassionate yet determined Eve replied: "We must not part."

Again he dared not trust his tongue . . .

The afterglow, pulsing through a hundred changes, faded, fainted, and contracted, till a long, clear pool of emeraude alone defined the foot of the sky, the profile of those hills within whose pleats night hung already close and breathless. Through its dark, across gulfs unguessable, lost lights winked, beaoning unknown heights. And the spreading surfaces of still water on every hand, so thickly shadowed as to be more felt than seen, grew wan by degrees with shine of stars.

Smartly tooled, with the sureness of a swallow's flight the car pursued its fan of yellow light over the intricate meander of the road, its windings, dips and soarings, while ever and again a bend ahead or the summit of some sharp ascent would take sudden shape in a sheen of spectral blue, heralding the advent of twin minor moons which, bearing down upon the brougham with a startling show of destructive mania, would pass harmlessly in a roaring rush; or some fleeting eye, crimson with anger, would be raised and over-

hauled and swept astern, metamorphosed into headlights of blank glare rocking in feebly furious emulation of that headlong pace.

The buffeting air grew cooler and yet more cold; but neither the man nor the woman minded. His love warm in his arms, Lanyard was trying to live for the moment only, to be oblivious of yesterday and reckless of tomorrow. He failed, of course: impossible for one who loved so well to be deaf to the murmurings of his heart against that resolution which, shaped by his soberest judgment, firmed by his will, bade him put love away tonight forevermore, lest harm befall her in whom love had its source and whole existence. This evening together must be the last: so he was fixed in his intention. But how tell Eve, how make her understand, win her consent and concurrence? . . .

"Why do you look behind so often, Michael?"

"A bad old habit," Lanyard lightly lied, cursing his stupidity for having let her remark that symptom of a mind perturbed—"a souvenir of bad old days. Jungle folk, they say, never are wholly reclaimed from jungle ways; the instincts of the chase are always cropping up in our least considered action, we are forever conceiving ourselves, as of old, hunter, and hunted in the same skin."

"My poor Michael!" The woman indulgently laughed. "Does he imagine he is deceiving somebody?"

"But do you not forget"—he snatched at this straw—"that there are motor-cycle police abroad, even on these back-country roads? Naturally one keeps an eye out for them . . ."

For all that Eve had again contrived to put him out of countenance, there had been colour of truth in his equivocation that had failed: Lanyard's restless vigilance was more instinctive than excited by any indication either that the car was being trailed or that the riddle of his whereabouts was one of any present interest to those whose malevolence he had sound reason to beware of. Since the previous night nothing had happened to show that Morpew had succeeded in having the devious way traced which Lanyard had taken en route from Folly's residence to his own lodgings and then on to the modest hotel which ultimately had provided him with a bed, or to contradict the inference that Morpew had decided to profit by his lesson in humility and count it cheap at its cost. . . . Than which last Lanyard could not readily imagine any hope more infatuate: Life had taught him too well to know the temper of the Morpew breed.

It was true, however, that he had been at some pains all day to keep himself rather thoroughly insulated against news from Morpew's side. The story of the recovered emeralds had "broken" too late for the morning papers; and although Crane beyond much doubt could have supplied helpful information, Lanyard had been studious to remain lost to that one, too, entertaining as he did not the remotest wish to be haled into court as a witness against Mallison.

Not that conscience reproached for the ruse which had brought about the arrest of the dancing man as the thief of night before last. Even though Mallison might in point of simple fact be innocent of that crime,

the severest sentence to which he was liable, if convicted, would be mild punishment for the part he had played in the conspiracy to blackmail Folly McFee; Lanyard cheerfully would have lied the man into a life term in requital for that alone, and with as much confidence would have looked to find the perjury recorded to his credit in the Judgment Book on the Day of the Last Accounting.

But if by any chance Mallison should manage to set up a convincing alibi, or even to leave his guilt or innocence an open question in Lanyard's mind, the doubt would find fresh force that would not down, new plausibility would clothe the fear that the Lone Wolf might have usurped dominion over the body and soul from which the mind of Michael Lanyard temporarily had been dispossessed, long enough to commit them anew to ancient ways of knavery.

In this respect at least Lanyard was constrained to own himself a moral coward: he shrank from any test that might result in proving him, though all unwittingly, apostate to the regeneration upon which Eve's faith in him was established; he held it torture intolerable to think that he might, in the last assay, be found wanting in the one condition that gave him a shadow of claim upon her consideration.

And with these thoughts a memory of later garnering lurked in the background of his reverie, a presence terrible and importunate . . . like a shape of horror stalking at the shoulder of one who treads the echoing emptiness of a house called haunted . . .

Opportunely that spectre was for the time being

banished by Eve's announcement: "We are nearly there."

Its pace growing momentarily more moderate, the car approached the mouth of a by-way where a roadside sign seared the night with letters of fire: INN OF THE GREEN WOODS. Wheeling headlights raked aisles of pines through which the road serpentineed at a sharp grade upward, leading the brougham out at last into a hilltop clearing where a rambling structure sat, of undressed logs, with deep verandas and windows of ingratiating warmth. To one side a few cars of earlier arrivals were parked. Indoors an atmosphere neither too rude nor too sybaritic made good Eve's recommendation, a discriminating taste had imposed the refinements of today upon yesterday's primitive accommodations. A great fireplace of field-stone nursed a blaze of logs grateful to flesh nipped by the night air. Tables dressed in good taste and not closely ranked gained an additional effect of privacy through low fences of rustic work setting them apart. Of these a number were in use when Eve de Montalais and Lanyard were conducted to one which waited in a corner, ready laid for them.

Not long after, still another party turned up and was assigned a nearby table. Lanyard accorded its four members the same shrewd but covert study which he had already wasted on their predecessors, perceiving in these newcomers, as well, nothing to re-excite a disposition to distrust mankind in toto which was yielding rapidly to the blandishments of that delightful and devoted presence at his elbow, a dinner most admirable

of its kind, and a wine finer than any a discriminating palate had relished in many a moon; influences so powerful as to compensate even his forebodings of the reckoning to come. Some acquaintance with the ways of road-houses like this, broad-minded enough to produce a bottle of sound Burgundy without so much as a gesture of deference to the law of the land, lent strength to the apprehension that, when Lanyard had settled his score, he would bear away from the Inn of the Green Woods a purse as thin as his expectation of a dull old age. And never a hope of being able to replenish it before the next quarterly remittance day, two months away!

A thought to drive a man in love distracted who had no other worries tearing at his heart. With all his might Lanyard tried to put it out of mind lest it shadow his mood too evidently to be misread. Eve must never be permitted to suspect that pride of penury had anything to do with his decision to make an end tonight of relations which, however heartrending the wrench that must sever them, love worthy of its inspiration might no longer sanction.

Either the wine or his anxiety to seem at ease loosened his tongue and enlivened his wit, Lanyard found himself talking with a humour and a verve that enabled him to ride cavalierly over awareness of the look in the eyes so constant to his, a look in which perplexity and patience too constantly found place. But all the while he was half-consciously preparing for the challenge which came when, with the room to themselves but for one other party of diners, they lingered over coffee and cigarettes before the fire.

"When are you going to tell me, Michael, what is on your mind?"

Words quietly spoken, like drops of cool water added one by one to the seething contents of a test tube, precipitating the elements of the situation between them. And he who had no small conceit in the readiness with which he was wont to deal with others, experienced now a moment of mental flurry, lost the thread of his argument, and stared helplessly into those smiling but intent eyes. She was finished, he had to recognize, with forbearance; nevertheless he could not but make one last attempt to stave off the inevitable.

"What should there be, Eve, more than you know?"

"Do you really want me to believe you have forgotten our talk, the other night at the Ritz, the discussion you yourself started and that, at my request, we didn't finish?"

"Must we recall that now?"

"It isn't like you, Michael, to palter . . . We aren't children any more, my dear; you know my mind and I know yours—at least in part. I love you and want you for my husband; but you won't ask me to marry you, of your own volition you have raised up the ghost of your dead yesterday to stand between us and"—she had a smile for the verbal extravagance—"forbid the banns! But I have refused to be frightened by bogeys. With that we left the question open, night before last; since when something has happened." She nodded gravely: "Tell me, Michael . . ."

"What makes you think—?"

"You love me too well to distress me needlessly by

leaving a matter so vital in suspense. If nothing had occurred to make you hesitate, for fear of giving me pain, you wouldn't be trying so hard to talk about everything imaginable but the one thing that counts."

He gave his head a tormented shake. "Is it not enough that, the more I weigh the circumstances, the more sure I feel I am right?—the only way to be fair to you is to take myself out of your life."

"But it seems to me I am the one to say what is fair or unfair to me. After all, my happiness is at stake."

"Not more than mine."

"Much more than yours. You are selfish, Michael—not meaning to be, but because you would hurt me to my very heart to spare yourself self-reproach, if ever after our marriage anything should come out of the past to trouble us. As if anything matters to a woman who loves, so long as she is well loved in return!"

"You show me to myself in an unkind light . . ."

"I am using every weapon I can find in my fight with life for the right to be happy."

"I would break my own heart rather than cause you an instant's unhappiness . . ."

"You think so, dear. But you at least would have the memory of an act of renunciation to console you—you could say to yourself: 'I suffer, but for her sake.' For me there would be only the knowledge that I had been cheated out of my due. I have the right to claim more of life than it has given me . . ."

The voice of melancholy music faltered, then resumed: "The War took my husband from me before

I was old enough to know what love could mean. Now, long after, I have found a greater love—and I am required to give it up solely because you are afraid somebody may some day tell me what I already knew, that once upon a time you were a little lower than the angels!”

To avoid the accusation of her look, Lanyard stared blindly into the fire.

“I am not good enough for such a love as yours, Eve.”

“Perhaps no one of us is good enough for Love. Yet we can try to be, by serving . . .”

Lanyard hung his head; and in accents of quiet conviction Eve de Montalais pursued: “Something *has* happened. I thought so, from your manner this afternoon, now I am sure. It isn’t that you have ceased to care for me—”

“You know it is not that.”

“What, then? It must be something quite as serious, you couldn’t hold out against me as you do if it were anything less. Michael: you can’t refuse to tell me now.”

He made a sign of submission combined with a plea for time in which to assort his thoughts. Indisputably nothing less than the truth would satisfy her; but it might be that something less than the whole truth, so sure to terrify the woman, would serve.

And while he sat turning the matter over in his mind, their waiter approached.

“Monsieur Paul Martin?” the man enquired, with an execrable attempt to give the words a French inflexion.

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In his abstraction, Lanyard signified an impatient negative, but Eve de Montalais was less thick-witted.

"What name?" she quickly enquired.

"Paul Martin, ma'm. He's wanted on the telephone—a long distance call."

"From New York?"

"I don't know, ma'm, the party didn't say, just asked for Monsieur Paul Martin—party with a sort of a foreign accent, French, I guess."

Eve looked sharply to Lanyard: "It is for you—you must answer it." He responded with a puzzled nod, though his memory needed no more jogging. But was it possible? he wondered, letting the waiter lead to the telephone booth in the office of the inn; aside from Eve and himself, that alias of a day long past was known to but three people in the world; and of these one was in London and one at last accounts in Paris, the third alone was in New York . . .

But if Liane knew where he was dining, so far away from Town, she must have been informed by somebody who had followed him without his knowledge!

Not the voice of Liane, but a man's saluted him above the humming of the long distance wire, a man's voice with, as the waiter had indicated, a strong tinge of nasal French.

"Monsieur Paul Martin?"

"Yes. Who wants him?"

"I am spikin' for 'is sister. Ees this Monsieur Martin spikin'?"

It was Liane who for her own ends had nominated

herself the sister of Monsieur Paul Martin, one day in Paris long ago.

Lanyard answered "Yes."

"Pardon, monsieur: your sister ees too beesy now to telephone you 'erself. She have ask' me to geev you a message.'

"Monsieur is most amiable," Lanyard replied in French. "What is the message, please?"

"Prenez garde."

"What do you say?"

"Bon soir, monsieur."

"Hello! hello!"

But Lanyard worried the hook in vain: the other had hung up, the wire was closed. . . .

Prenez garde—take care!

XIV

LANYARD took back to Eve by the fire the most dégagé manner he could manage, a manner of leisured good humour that wasn't all put on at the prompting of amour propre, that was assumed less in hope of hoodwinking her ingenious intuitions than for the benefit of their fellow guests, if so be it these entertained any latent interest in the reactions of Michael Lanyard to a long distance call for "Monsieur Paul Martin," and that dissembled better than he believed a sense of discouragement the most devastating he had ever known—not on his account alone so much as that he was not alone.

The quandary in which he found himself trapped, now that his eyes had been opened by that singular admonition from out of the night, at once cryptic and only too intelligible, was one that defied and, what was worse, promised persistent defiance to the utmost of his resources, from which extrication with credit to himself—or, if it came to that, with his life—seemed out of the question. Not that he put life first: his solicitude was nine parts unselfish, his disheartenment the fruit of inability to hit on any pretext that conceivably would induce Eve to part then and there with one whose company had all at once become equivalent to a pistol trained on her heart point-blank—and with

a finger both pitiless and anonymous trembling on the trigger.

A strong statement, but one that by no means painted their predicament an exaggerated black. His "sister" had never played her confrères false or resorted to subterfuge so subtle to put "Monsieur Paul Martin" on his guard against a nebulous or trifling menace. Liane owed Lanyard much on an old score, she would have been faithless to the code of her kind had she, having definite foreknowledge of it, permitted so good a friend to go blindly to meet the fate prepared for him, whatever that might be; such women are nevertheless jealous wardens of their own welfare, it had required perception of a peril to Lanyard immediate and desperate to work Liane up to the point of chancing the resentment of Morphey should her treachery ever transpire. Witness the extravagant pains she had taken to disguise her hand.

No: it would never do to underprize this proof of good will or to read in Liane's warning any spirit but one of the most earnest anxiety. Taken as she had unquestionably intended it, her "prenez-garde" decoded somewhat to this effect: "You are sadly self-deluded, my friend, if you think Morphey resigned to stomach defeat at your hands, or that you have succeeded in keeping your movements hidden from him. He has never for an instant lost sight either of you or of his revenge, he is playing you as heartlessly as an angler plays a trout, gaff in hand—you must go warily to cheat its barbs."

The dilemma thus exposed was appalling: a clean

breast of all he had been trying to hide from her was unavoidable if he hoped to make Eve comprehend why he held it imperative for them to seek each a separate way back to New York; whereas, once she did grasp the fact that danger threatened him, she would surely refuse to let him risk it alone. Women of her rare stamp are never readily dismayed or disposed to think first of themselves if physical peril frown also upon one by whom their affections have been engaged. . . . Regard the spirit that poised Eve then in that juncture, awaiting his return with a countenance as composed as it was fair, with eyes unclouded by any confession of impatience or misgivings.

"Sorry I was so long," Lanyard said with intention to be heard across the dining-room. "I stopped to pay the bill and order the car brought round. If you don't mind . . ."

"It's quite time," Eve amiably agreed—"if we're to get home at any respectable hour."

He resumed his chair before the fire and utilized his cigarette case and a match to cover sidelong study of the four who had come in so soon after his arrival with Eve, and who remained still at table, dawdling with dessert. But he couldn't see that his announcement had meant anything to these . . .

The one woman of their number was a creature of strapping comeliness whose hail-fellow swagger was brazen that had been piquant in the flapper she heavily aped; while the men were such as would hardly have won a second glance on any ordinary occasion, types of the American bourgeois case-hardened by "good

business," clothed in a weirdly uniform mode of smartness, something stale with over-feeding and drinking and fondling, wanting stimulation yet inclined to grow causelessly arrogant in their cups. But Lanyard was too well learned in the ways of urban America not to know that its Apaches seldom if ever conform to the cliché of the cinema when it turns its cyclopædic if gullible eye on what it knows as denizens of the underworld. The gunman of New York is blown with pride of caste; for all that he isn't keen on bidding for the attention of the police by sporting the conventionalized make-up of a suspicious character, he far prefers to pass in a crowd as a simple man in the street normally addicted to the machine-made "clothing of distinction" of the magazine advertisements. The fact, then, that these three were apparently nobodies in particular minding their own business, didn't necessarily mean that Lanyard could afford to dismiss them from his calculations.

Neither did he, careful though he was to give them no excuse for suspecting he had one thought to spare from the woman at his side.

"There is no one like you," he was saying in gallant repayment of her steadfast and demanding attention: "the loveliest woman that ever breathed, the most adorably patient . . ."

"How little you know me!" she calmly commented—"at least, if you expect me to believe you think me patient. Then your message was important?"

"Very," the man admitted: the time was by when fencing were anything but waste of time. "I am worried about getting you back to Town . . ."

"So it was Mademoiselle Delorme!"

"That only goes to show," Lanyard obliquely remarked, "one should never tell you anything one expects you to forget."

"I have forgotten nothing you have ever told me about yourself—nothing, least of all, that had to do with another woman's affection for you."

"Yet you are incapable of jealousy."

"Still, I am very greedy, I don't like sharing even the least of your thoughts with any other woman."

"Oh!" he laughed—"but Liane isn't a woman, except professionally."

"You are tantalizing me all the same when you don't tell me what she had to say—and how in Heaven's name she guessed you were dining here—and why she resurrected that old *nom de guerre* instead of calling for you by your right name."

"I'm afraid Liane didn't guess, I suspect somebody told her we had stopped here to dine—"

The teasing half-smile with which Eve had been regarding her lover was erased. "You think we were followed—!"

"How else could they have known?"

"'They'?"

"Who informed Liane."

"But why should she have harked back to 'Paul Martin'?"

"I fancy her reason for that is implicit in Liane's message, a brief one—delivered, if it matters, by a stranger's tongue—'*prenez garde*'."

Eve nodded thoughtful confirmation of a private

conjecture. "You are in some danger?" Not at all deceived by the shrug that sought to depreciate the weight of that term, she glanced quickly to and from the little party that was, just then, noisily making merry at its table across the room. In response, another movement of Lanyard's shoulders disclaimed intelligence: "Perhaps . . . Who knows?"

"You must tell me everything . . ."

"I know; but it's a fairish yarn, and the car ought to be here any minute—I'll hardly have time before we leave. So let me first of all throw myself upon your mercy, Eve, beg you to trust me."

"But you know I do, in every way."

"I mean: trust me to know what is best . . ."

Analysis of this ambiguity knitted a speculative frown. "You're going to ask something of me I won't want to do."

"It is dangerous for us to attempt the journey back to New York together."

"Dangerous," Eve objected, "isn't definite enough."

"It would appear that one whom I have recently been obliged to humiliate plans to pay me out tonight. He will fail—trust me for that—but I shall be more free to make him see the error of his ways if I can feel sure the harm meant for me can't by mischance be visited upon you instead."

"Ah, no, my friend! you don't seriously think I will consent . . ."

"You would not hesitate if I could only make it clear how much better my chances would be."

"I'm afraid it's a hopeless task, but"—she made her smile provoking—"suppose you try."

"Conceive, then"—Lanyard spoke deliberately in an endeavour to put the business in a nutshell—"that after leaving you night before last I was thrown in with one who chose to declare war on me for his own ends—"

"The Sultan of Loot!"

"Why try to keep anything from you?"

"You forget, I too had a premonition concerning that creature. Who is he?"

"I can more easily tell you what he is. He styles himself Morphew and the Tenderloin calls him King of the Bootleggers—justly, one is told. In addition, he nurses a penchant for having a finger in every lawless pie. To discipline me, that night, he caused the loot of a burglary to be hidden in my pockets while I lay in a stupor, drugged by his direction, then saw to it that I was suspected of having committed the theft."

"Oh, no!" the woman interrupted involuntarily, revolted by the bare suggestion of such enormity.

"Or else—I must believe I stole the jewels myself, in instinctive reversion to old ways, drink having abolished the inhibitions of the new."

"Never!"

"I do not know," Lanyard confessed with a wry face. "There are circumstances which make me uneasy . . . I do not know!"

"How can you even suggest such a thing?"

"Let me tell you . . . Last night I visited—or revisited!—the house from which the jewels had been stolen, meaning secretly to restore them. This I man-

aged. I was even more fortunate in being able to bring about the arrest of one of Morpew's lot as the burglar of fact—which the fellow may well have been. Finally, to confuse pursuit, I quitted the house by the way the burglar had taken the night before—let myself out of a window to the roof of an extension, dropped down to a backyard, scaled a board fence, and stole through an excavation for a new building to the street beyond. Eve . . .”

Lanyard faltered and worked his hands together, his features wrung, haunted eyes reflecting the enigma of the embers which held their stare. And with a gesture of quick sympathy, the woman sat forward to screen him. But these others seemed to be completely preoccupied with their own hilarious concerns; and the racket of congenial voices they raised must have prevented their overhearing anything of Lanyard's confession when at length he resumed.

“Up to that time,” he said slowly, “I had hardly questioned the assumption that Morpew deliberately had schemed to victimize me . . . But then, while I was creeping away from that house, quite literally like a thief in the night—once upon the roof, again when I stood in the kitchen-yard, looking back at the blank rear windows, and yet again while stumbling through that foundation pit beyond the fence—at every stage of that journey I knew a feeling as of doing something I had done before, repeating the identical moves I had made at another time, upon an occasion strangely forgotten . . .”

“Well?” the woman in cool amusement asked.

"Well!"—his smile sketched a wistful expression of bewilderment—"I do not know, perhaps it was true, perhaps . . ."

Careless whether they were observed, the woman leaned forward and lightly covered one of his hands with her own. "Poor dear!" she cried, with a thrill of fond laughter—"to let himself be so tormented by a sensation such as everybody has at times."

"Everybody?" he iterated in a stare.

"It happens to us all—has it never happened to you before?—a phenomenon so common the psychologists have a special name for it. What *do* they call it? reflex memory? Something of the sort, I forget . . . One only needs a new scene and a mood especially susceptible to impressions of strangeness or beauty—and all at once one feels quite sure one has visited that very spot in some previous existence. Precisely that happened to you, last night, my Michael, in your super-excited state of mind, worried by ignorance of the truth about the stolen property in your possession. . . . Take my word for it."

"You believe that?" he insisted—"truly?"

"Truly, my dear."

"You don't think I could possibly—?"

"Never—I know you better than you do yourself." Eve gave his hand a comforting pressure, and sat back. "If you let anything so absurd fret you another instant I shall be cross with you."

"You make me happy," Lanyard said. "It costs me something to tell you . . ."

"I know!"



A Columbia Pictures Corporation Production.

The Lone Wolf Returns.
A DIABOLICAL SHADOW HERALDS THE APPROACH OF MORPHEW, KING OF LOOT.

"I don't deserve such faith."

"But I don't consider you a good judge of your own worth, dear. And now that I understand the situation—you've made a fool and an enemy of this man Morphew, and he's conspiring to be revenged—tell me, what is it you have to propose about returning to Town?"

"I want you to let me find my way back alone. I have consulted road-maps and time-tables posted in the office here. There's a train for New York from the nearest station"—Lanyard glanced at the watch on his wrist—"in about half an hour. . . . Which reminds me, your driver is taking his time."

"Patience. He's always tinkering with the motor—he'll be ready any minute. You were saying—?"

"I want you to let me drop you at the railroad and take the train back to Town, with your chauffeur for protection, while I go on in the car."

Undisguised derision honoured this proposal. "But why should I, when it is you, not I, the Sultan of Loot is after? If the train can be considered safe, surely you're the one—"

"You forget, Morphew's people will aim at your motor-car, believing me to be in it whether I am or not. If I should succeed in leaving it unobserved, they would still pursue the car. You can't ask me to expose you to a danger from which I turn tail."

"Then why shouldn't we both take the train?"

"It is what you American call an accomodation—stops at every station. If we should abandon your car to be found near the railroad, it would be too

simple to have the train anticipated by telephone, boarded somewhere between here and New York, and the two of us kept so closely watched we would have no chance . . .”

The woman’s head described a sign of flat rejection——Lanyard’s rueful recognition of an outcome foreseen.

“Impossible, my friend. I couldn’t dream of leaving you to shift for yourself.”

“But how else——?”

“I have a saner scheme. Why not stop here for the night? The inn must have accomodations. . . . You see!” Eve cried in laughing triumph—“you are trying to get rid of me when the truth is, you need me. Two heads are better than one . . . But why shake yours so dourly?”

“I am afraid of your plan for more reasons than one. Daylight for our return will hardly be the same thing as accident insurance. If you give me my choice, I like darkness better.”

“And your other reasons——?”

“If I stop here overnight, where I am beyond much doubt under surveillance even now, I remain placed and give Morpew just so much more time to close his net round me. And nothing I know of makes this inn a sanctuary or guarantees the bona fides of the management.”

“You don’t mean to say you think the people who run this place——!”

“I have been taught to trust nobody at times like this. More than that, everybody knows most of these

resorts in and about New York that openly flout the Prohibition Amendment are actively in league with if not actually owned by bootlegging interests. I will breathe more comfortably, I promise you, when—and if—we are permitted to go our way unhindered.”

“Oh, but surely you exaggerate!”

“Possibly; it’s not always a bad fault, by no means so bad as under-exaggeration when one’s neck is concerned. However, it can’t be long now before we know.”

Seeing their waiter approach, Lanyard got up and took Eve’s wrap from the back of her chair. But the natural expectation of word that the brougham was at the door suffered a blight even before the man spoke, by reason of the odd look with which he saluted Lanyard.

“Excuse me, Mr. Martin,” he said with—or instinct was at fault—a tinge of mockery in his supple habit—“the manager’s compliments, and he’d be much obliged if you’d step into the office a minute, he’d like to have a word with you.”

“Indeed? What does the good man want?”

“If it’s all the same to you, sir, it’d be better if you’d kindly talk with the boss.”

“About what?”

“Well, sir,” the waiter stammered—“I don’t want to alarm the lady—something’s happened.”

Lanyard looked to Eve with lifting brows. “If you will excuse me—”

“I don’t think I will,” Eve cheerfully replied, rising. “And I don’t in the least mind being alarmed. I’m coming along.”

With a formal bow of consent, Lanyard folded the wrap round her shoulders, then threw his coat over his arm and prepared to follow the waiter. But the latter was just then peremptorily hailed by the host of the remaining party with a demand for "the check"; so Lanyard and Eve proceeded to the little office unescorted, to find awaiting them a person of decent manners with an intelligent if at the moment somewhat harassed eye. There had been, he began, an unfortunate accident, he was more sorry than he could say that it had occurred in his establishment . . .

"What sort of an accident?" Lanyard with a touch of asperity cut his apologies short.

"If you and your lady don't mind stepping this way, I'll show you . . ."

Ushered out to the night, they were conducted round the corner of the building to the space where, in the chilly glimmer of a belated moon, the brougham stood parked with one other motor-car, and, near the former, two men were stooping over something that rested motionless upon the packed earth, one of them focussing upon it the beam of an electric torch.

Lanyard touched Eve's arm, recommending her to wait aside, and with the manager joined the group round the supine body of Eve's chauffeur.

The man lay in a limp sprawl, his face in that uncompromising glare a congested crimson, mouth slack and drooling, half-closed lids showing only the whites of eyes rolled back, stertorous respiration fouling the sweet smell of the night—evidently no worse than dead drunk.

"I just don't know how he worked it to get like this," the manager was protesting. "It's dead against our rules to sell hootch to chauffeurs, and I'll sack the bird responsible for this if I have to bounce the whole staff to get rid of him. But that isn't any comfort to you, I guess."

"None," Lanyard curtly agreed.

"He was all right as long's he was sittin' in the chowfers' dinin'-room," the man with the lamp volunteered—"you wouldn't have thought he'd had more'n a couple. But as soon as the cold air hit him he flopped like somebody'd crowned him. Funny . . ."

"No doubt you find it so."

"The only thing I can suggest, Mr. Martin," the manager put in, Lanyard thought too eagerly, "is to lend you somebody to drive you back to New York. Arthur here's a darn' good driver, knows all the roads like a book."

"That's very good of you," Lanyard returned, with a warning eye for Eve. "We'll be glad to make it worth Arthur's while, for neither of us can drive or has even a general idea of the roads. But first"—the toe of his boot stirred the body—"we would like to be sure this poor fool will get proper attention. I daresay you can give him a room."

"Of course, sir—and I'll 'phone for a doctor, if you say so, though I don't think that ought to be necessary. This isn't any case of wood-alcohol poisoning, there isn't a drop of bad liquor in the house—"

"I'm sure there isn't. All the same, what he had must have been wicked stuff. If you don't mind hav-

ing him carried indoors, I'll make an examination myself—I have a limited amount of medical knowledge.”

“You bet I will . . .”

Directed by the speaker, the two underlings, with no noteworthy enthusiasm, surrendered the torch and their leisure, lifted the body of the drunkard by the legs and shoulders and, staggering with the weight of that inert lump, made crabwise progress toward the rear entrance to the inn, the manager following with the light while Lanyard turned back to Eve with a suggestion clearly articulated for the benefit of whatever ears might care to hear.

“If you'll make yourself comfortable in the car, I promise I won't keep you waiting long.”

“Thank you,” Eve equably returned. “I don't mind waiting, and I do want to be sure that poor boy is in no real danger.”

Lanyard offered Eve a hand, but the door he unlatched was one that admitted not to the car but to the front seat of the driver's right.

“Quick!” he urged in an undertone, and when Eve was in place doubled round to the other side of the brougham.

But the manager was not napping. “Here now!” he remonstrated, jolted out of his vocational urbanity, and came running back—“thought you said you couldn't—”

The moonlight silvered something in his hand which might or might not have been the darkened torch, and which Lanyard could not afford to give the benefit of the doubt. Standing on the running-board, without

the smallest compunction he planted a foot in the midriff of the man so forcibly that the latter dropped whatever it was he had been holding and, with a yelp, doubled up.

Immediately settling into place behind the wheel, Lanyard released the emergency brake, with the result that the brougham, standing on a slight downgrade, began to move of its own weight even before he could locate the starting pedal. Muttering a prayer of thankfulness, he meshed the gears in third and swung the car into the down-hill road. At the same time the two who had been carrying the chauffeur let their senseless burden drop and started in pursuit. One tripped over some inequality in the ground and plunged to his knees. The other gained the running-board in a bound and aimed a blow at Lanyard's head. It went wide, and Lanyard's fist glanced upon the fellow's jaw with sufficient weight to dislodge him. Beating the air with frantic arms, he disappeared.

Fumbling for the switch with one hand, with the other Lanyard steered for the maw of the road through the woods. For one more instant the inn, painted with pale lunar phosphorescence, stood out in bold relief against its background of blurred forest, while with the tail of his eye Lanyard saw its front door of a sudden release a stream of saffron light. Somebody shouted in profane astonishment, somebody stumbled out upon the veranda and pelted toward the parking space. Then, between two heartbeats, Lanyard solved the secret of headlights and ignition, and the brougham, momentum sharply hastened, swept on into the pillared tunnel through the pines.

At first, hands that hadn't grasped a wheel in years had all they could do to hold the lurching fabric to a sharply declivitous and twisting path. Then the grade grew more moderate, the way less tortuous, and the car, obedient to its brakes, slipped gently past the fiery sign and turned its nose southwards on the highway.

"Well done!" Eve applauded—"Oh, well done!"

"Wait!" Lanyard prayed, with the man in mind who had sprinted from the lighted doorway toward the other car—"physical fact to the contrary notwithstanding, we're not out of the woods yet."

His toe found the accelerator pedal, the motor responded with a mettlesome snort and a drumming drone that waxed apace, the car clove the night like a frightened cat . . .

After a mile or so of fast going on a road whose windings required for safe navigation a sure hand and eye, Lanyard felt confidence confirmed in his ability to handle the brougham with fair skill and extract from its motor the best it had to give. And when, before long, a rarely long stretch of straight road made a fair trial feasible, he coaxed the speedometer by degrees up to, then past the mark 50, without feeling that he was tempting fate.

Toward the end of that dash, Eve, who had been keeping an eye on the road astern, reported it bare of pursuing headlights.

"Do you mean to try for that railroad?"

"No—not now, not since things have turned out as they have."

"I am glad," she told him coolly. "This night is

too lovely to be spoiled by travelling in a stuffy train."

"Is it?" he queried in grim humour.

"Do you not find it so, my Michael?"

"I find it damnably dangerous."

"And I find it, danger and all, divine."

But Lanyard drove in an obsession of fatality . . . The road, a river of oxidized silver threading an upland world of purples and blacks in blended masses and ever and again opening up vistas of long valleys filled with mist like streams of milk, was a gauntlet of deadly perils. In the blue bowl of the sky it bleached the misshapen moon like a grinning devil-mask swung from side to side of the devious way. The vast stillness that dwelt upon the world beneath had a brooding effect as of beauty holding its breath in dread. Through that somehow abnormal hush the swaying bulk of the brougham bored like something wild of eye and mad with fear. The wind its flight created had an insane whine, and the incessant drum of its exhaust, echoing from hard smooth surfaces, was re-echoed by hills and woods and fields with a rumour as of tom-toms thrumming a bacchanal of death . . .

But to the woman who loved Lanyard it was all divine . . .

Summing up another survey of the road behind, she declared: "There is nothing. You have outwitted and distanced them."

"Have I?"

"Is there more to fear?"

"But everything."

"Even an open road?"

"Who can say what may lie in wait for us round the next bend?"

"What does it matter, so we go to meet it together?"

Neither daring to take his eyes from the streaming road nor knowing how to answer her, Lanyard gave only a groan.

"I fear nothing but to be parted from you. Promise we shall never part."

He could not promise . . .

"Michael!" the heartbreaking voice at his shoulder insisted—"why don't you answer me? Surely you can't still be thinking I will ever let you go?"

He contrived to say, almost explosively: "But I must."

"Ah, no, no! Michael, you couldn't hurt me so."

"Is not tonight enough to prove to you no man who loved you truly could consent to expose you to such a life? It is my fate to love you too well . . ."

What the woman said to that was lost in the blast of a tyre blown out on one of the front wheels. An instantaneous swerve toward a ditch by the roadside all but wrenched the wheel out of control and resulted in a wreck. As it was, frantic work averted that disaster by the slenderest of scrapes. With locked brakes the brougham skidded drunkenly and rolled to a halt broadside to a bluff over across from the ditch.

With amazing self-command, Lanyard suffered never a syllable of a seething vocabulary to escape his lips as he unlatched the door and leaped down. An instant later Eve on her side alighted and came round to join him. Together, they contemplated in silence the rup-

tured tyre and the two good spares locked in their rack—and the key in the pocket of a chauffeur sleeping off his drink in the Inn of the Green Woods, fifteen miles or more away!

From contemplation of this bad business, Lanyard turned to consider their position, and found it equally bad. The car stood, as far off the road as it could be, but nevertheless somewhat blocking its narrow width, on the waist of an S bend, with a hillside blinding the approach on one hand, a wilderness of young forest on the other. And even as the thought formed that it would be well to move on at once, headlights illuminated the curve ahead, then swung into view, and a car coming from the direction of New York bore down at nothing less than forty miles an hour.

Lanyard had barely time to catch Eve by the arm and drag her out of its path, a manœuvre which took them both to the side of the road bordered by the ditch. Simultaneously the bellow of an unmuffled exhaust told of the approach of another car from the opposite direction. When Lanyard first saw it, it was less than a hundred feet distant, moving at a terrific rate—and running without lights!

So that was why Eve had been able to detect no sign of pursuit . . .

The first car, forced by the stationary brougham to sheer to the wrong side of the road, loosed upon the night a blare of frenzy. Through this penetrated Eve's wail of terror. Lanyard swung to her like a maniac, seized the woman and, exerting every ounce of his strength, caught her up bodily and flung her off the road, into the ditch.

Too late to save himself . . .

The moon, reeling in its blanched blue field, was a scimitar of white flame. It swooped down through the firmament as might the wrath of God. The world like a bomb exploded beneath his feet; a quivering mass of agony, he was hurled far and far into an everlasting abyss of night impenetrable . . .

XV

PAIN that threatened to rend his head asunder played before his eyes in blinding flashes, like ragged lightning, crimson and soundless—or the man was deaf to its thunders whose every other faculty was numb in subjugation to sense of pain intolerable, who was faint with pain, sick with it . . .

Hands clipped his body under the arm-pits, a thin, far rumour of articulate noise pronounced some stupidity which he made no attempt either to comprehend or to acknowledge. Arms wrapped round him from behind tightened, heaved, he was set upon unsteady feet, then half-carried, half-guided to an angle of some sort and propped up in it, with arms resting on two broad, plane surfaces, elbow-high. A rudely genial voice volunteered: "There you are, sir, and no 'arm done. Now you'll do nicely."

Lanyard wanted to tell the speaker he was a fool, it was impossible for one to have come through that motor wreck, impossible for any mortal to have been caught between two heavy cars meeting head-on in headlong flight, without incurring desperate if not deadly injuries. How reasonable and true that was this pain proved that racked him from head to foot, but more particularly his head, and made him want to retch, pain so acute it paralyzed the very instinct to complain.

His tongue temporarily refusing its office, Lanyard contented himself with a grunt through locked teeth; and because his knees were as water, hung on with both hands to the rounded surfaces that met behind his back to form the angle, till presently the pain grew less, the feeling of nausea passed off, his senses renewed contact with their environment and flashed strange tidings to his brain in respect of conditions they could neither grasp nor accomodate themselves to.

Some moron (he inferred) had taken to amusing himself with the headlights of one of the motor-cars, switching them on and off while they stared Lanyard full in the face at such close range that he was conscious of the heat they generated between the spaces of darkness. Furthermore, a storm of sorts had evidently sprung up out of that clear midnight sky: he remembered well how cloudless it had been just before the collision, how bright with mockery the gibbous moon; the boding calm which had bound everything in Nature he recalled distinctly, too. But now a great wind was shrieking like a warlock, gusts of warm rain spattered the flesh of his face, the very earth beneath him was convulsed, bucking and rocking like a wild mustang, and the keen, sweet smell of the inland night had given place to the salt breath of the sea . . .

Lanyard opened his eyes, only to close them tight the next instant and shut out what indisputably was the delusion of a mind deranged; yet a vision so vividly coloured and in every particular so circumstantial, stamping the retinas with an impression of so much brilliance and animation, that he could not refrain from

looking again, if only to convince himself of the sheer wonder of it—but half expecting his sight, on this occasion, to be greeted by another illusion and a different, if one quite as impossibly unreal.

He saw, however, precisely what he had seen, and rejected, before . . .

A length of steamer deck, looking forward from the angle in which he stood at the after end of the superstructure, with deck-chairs all folded and lashed to the inner rail and window-ports all fast; its scoured planking now blue with shadow cast by the deck overhead, now flooded with sun glare from end to end, as the vessel rolled in a rough seaway. Beyond the rail a bright blue sky without a cloud, a horizon unbroken by any loom of land, a sea of incredible ultramarine creaming under the lash of a full gale, the sleek hollow bellies of its charging waves a-dazzle with the sun's spilled gold, its flying spindrift sprays of diamond-dust . . .

Forward, opposite the entrance to the saloon companionway, a girl clinging to the rail, bobbed blonde hair fluffed out by the wind, filmy yellow sweater and brief sports-skirt of white silk moulded to her slender young contours, intent eyes turned aft to Lanyard. In the dark mouth of the door a cluster of men and women, likewise staring. Nearer and a little to the left a lithe young man of British stamp, wearing a look of cheerful concern and the white-duck jacket of a steward, with long legs well apart balancing to the motion of the vessel while he watched Lanyard.

Finding himself the target of the latter's bemused

regard, the man grinned broadly. "Nahsty tumble, sir," he cried in the penetrating pitch of a seafarer schooled to talk against the wind, and with an inflexion that suited precisely his racial type—"and a wicked crack it did give your 'ead and no mistike. Like a pistol shot it sounded. Thought for a minute it 'ad done you in for fair, but it didn't take long to mike sure you 'adn't broke' no bones. 'Ow do you feel now, sir?"

"What . . ." Lanyard's voice in his hearing was attenuated and strange. His tongue felt unwieldy. "What . . .?"

The figure in the white jacket waved a hand toward the foot of a ladder nearby. "You was comin' down from the bridge-deck, sir—don't you remember?—when a sea 'it us and knocked you clean off your pins. 'Ad to 'ang on to the rail to keep from bein' knocked abaht myself."

Lanyard replied with a sign of exorcism, releasing the rail with one hand to describe it. At the same time he shut his eyes fast and made a determined effort to shake off the bondage of this fantastic dream. But when he looked again nothing had changed, the hallucination remained as definite and bright as ever, perfect to its last least detail.

"Feel a bit shiken up, don't you, sir?" The steward moved to Lanyard's side. "I don't wonder. But if you'll just tike it easy a while, I think you'll find you aren't much 'urt."

Dumbfounded, Lanyard wagged his head, bringing about recurrence of its splitting ache, which none

the less led to the discovery that, barring a bruised shoulder and elbow, a well-battered head was all his damage. But this too he laid to delirium, as being a manifest physical inconsistency in one who had just taken part in a motor smash of the first magnitude. And wondering if exertion of will would bring this lunatic scramble of a world round to its right guise of reality, he fixed the steward with an exacting eye, the eye of a man who had made up his mind to stand for no more nonsense.

"Madame de Montalais?" he enunciated distinctly ← "is she all right?"

But demonstrably this wasn't the requisite magic formula, enunciation of it failed to do away with those unbelievably factual circumstances of a summer gale at sea and set up in their stead an autumnal nocturne of moonlit hills and vales. Its only effect, indeed, was to light a flicker of real solicitude in the steward's eyes.

"Beg pardon, sir: what was that you said?"

"The lady with me—was she injured?"

"But there wasn't any lidy with you, sir—you was quite alone, arf w'y down the ladder, when the sea 'it us. I 'appened to be watchin' you, sir, though not 'andy enough to save you the fall, I'm sorry to s'y. But per'aps you feel strong enough now to let me 'elp you to your berth and fetch the doctor to give you a look over."

Lanyard in despair resigned himself: the world had gone stark staring mad and he was the maddest mad-man in it. Weakly he suffered the steward to take his arm in a respectful yet persuasive hold.

"Let me see, now, sir: what was the number of your stiteroom?"

In unbounded amazement Lanyard heard himself reply without any hesitation: "Thirty-nine."

"Quite so, sir. This w'y, if you please, and lean on me as 'eavy as you like: I won't let you tike another tumble, never fear."

A door in the after wall of the superstructure admitted to a passage by way of which it was only a step to Stateroom 39. Here the steward considerably removed the passenger's coat and shoes and made him comfortable in a berth wedged with pillows, then hurried away to call the ship's surgeon, leaving Lanyard to nurse a temper of dull indignation, satisfied that he was being somehow sold by his ingrate senses, but quite incapable of understanding how. His head still hurt like hell—there was a cruel swelling above one ear—and seemed to be utterly of no service other than as a container for pain-impregnated cotton wool that stifled every essay of his wits to seize the meaning of his present plight. After a while he gave up trying to think and lay looking round the room with resentful eyes; to move these in their orbits made them ache intolerably, but there was nothing else to do . . .

The stateroom had been designed and fitted to accommodate three people without crowding. Nevertheless it had every appearance of dedication to the uses of a single tenant. A solitary dressing-gown and one suit of pyjamas hung on hooks behind the door. One collection of shaving implements and other masculine toilet articles cluttered the shelves above the wash-

stand. A lonely kit-bag, obviously on its first voyage out of the shop, displayed the monogram A. D. None of these was Lanyard able to identify as property of his. If you asked him, he could swear he had never laid eyes on them before. But neither was he on terms of visual acquaintance with the coat which the steward had stripped from his shoulders and which was now oscillating like some uncouth and eccentric pendulum from a hook at the foot of the berth. A garment fashioned of the smokiest of Scotch tweed but with an incurably American accent, it gave circumstantial contradiction to the feeling that one had no business to pose as the rightful tenant of that stateroom; for quite as apparently one had had no business posing as the rightful tenant of that coat.

But the affair as a whole was past puzzling out by a head whose buzzing mocked every attempt at ordered thought; and with a sigh Lanyard gave it up for the time being, and shut his eyes to screen out refracted sun-glare wavering like a prismatic cobweb on the white paint overhead . . .

Consciousness was on the point of lapsing when the door-latch rattled and the inimitable cadences of a British public school voice hailed him with an affection of friendliness whose falsity was more elusive, and yet somehow less successful, than it commonly is in the bedside geniality of the general practitioner.

"Ah, Mr. Duchemin! been tryin' to butt a hole through the promenade deck, have you?"

Disguising instinctive resentment, Lanyard smiled amiably up at a new face that proved a good match

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for the voice, the sanguine face of a young man, cleanly razored, set with hard blue eyes and an arrogant, thin nose. "Monsieur . . ." he managed to say, rousing on an elbow; but the movement caused agony to stab through his temples again and he dropped back to his pillow, groaning.

"Bad as all that, eh?" the other commented in a tone that somehow implied he wasn't being taken in. "Well! needn't punish yourself to prove it to me: I'm not fussy about fine points of etiquette, I don't insist on everybody risin' when I come into the room. Lie still now, and let me have a look."

"You are the ship's surgeon, monsieur?" Lanyard enquired with difficulty, because his teeth were set to stifle grunts as fingers deft enough but none too gentle searched out the sore spot.

"Well: I leave it to you," their owner replied in ironic patience . . . "Hmm! worse than I expected. Miracle you got off without a fracture. . . . Do you think I've been pullin' your leg about my ratin' these last few nights? Or d'you mean my luck at Bridge qualifies me in your estimation as a card-sharp first and a sea-goin' sawbones last? . . . Hold still, now, and don't try to answer: I'm goin' to sponge this noble contusion and decorate it with a becoming patch."

An interlude of intense discomfort came to an end with the announcement: "You'll do now, I fancy; but if I were you, my friend, I'd take it easy and watch my step till this hatful of wind blows itself out—which it ought to before long, goin' by the glass."

"Many thanks, monsieur . . ."

A rising inflection made that last word an open bid for the name of the person addressed; who, however, chose coolly to ignore it.

"And now, if you don't mind ownin' up," he said with a clearer note of sarcasm: "What the devil are you drivin' at? *Am* I the ship's surgeon! Tryin' to make out a triflin' crack on the head has knocked you silly? Because it's no go, if you are: I may be the demon Bridge player of this vessel, but I'm a good enough medico besides to know that, barrin' a beautiful bump, you're as right as rain."

It was anything but easy to school oneself to stomach such superciliousness; but it had to be done if one hoped to learn the reason for it, or the inwardness of those several other matters which urgently required elucidation.

"If you would be so good as to sit down one moment, monsieur," Lanyard civilly suggested—"assuming, of course, your valuable time permits—I would be most grateful for your professional advice."

"Right-O!" The surgeon drew up a chair and settled himself in it with the manner of a man who didn't mind humouring a persistent child this once. "What's on your mind, Mr. Duchemin—more than your casualty?"

"To begin with, I should be glad to know the time of day."

"Why not consult that pretty trinket strapped on your wrist? Or was that, too, cracked by your fall?"

Indignation failed while Lanyard studied the time-

piece to which his attention had thus delicately been drawn, with the more interest because, to the best of his knowledge, the watch, unmistakably a fine one, was none of his.

Through the concert of the gale three double strokes of resonant bell-metal sang and were followed by a single. "Seven bells of the forenoon watch," the surgeon interpreted of his own accord. "Does yours agree?"

"Precisely . . . Monsieur," Lanyard said earnestly: "I should like very much to consult you concerning myself in strict confidence . . ."

"Let the oath of Hippocrates comfort your misgivings—and fire away."

"Then let me tell you something." After a brief pause Lanyard announced with a deal of true diffidence: "It is now some twelve hours, or little more, by my best reckoning, since I figured unfortunately in a motor-car accident on the Armonk Road, in Westchester County, thirty miles or so north of the city of New York."

"That's interestin'," the Englishman commented with a skeptical twitch of lips—"especially in view of the fact that we are now three days' run south of New York."

"Monsieur is not making fun of me?"

"No, thanks: that sort of thing doesn't amuse me as it does you."

"But I am entirely serious, I assure you."

"Haven't the slightest doubt of it. All the same I'd give somethin' to know what it is you're so serious about."

"Be patient with me another minute, monsieur," Lanyard devoted at least that much time to anxious thought. "Yesterday," he at length submitted, "was the third of November, Nineteen Twenty-two."

"You're going to have trouble, my friend, makin' that statement jibe with the log, which calls today the fifth of June, Twenty-three."

Lanyard lifted a hand to beg for grace, and did the sum in his head while the Englishman sat watching him with what all but insufferably seemed to be contemptuous amusement. But one couldn't afford to resent that yet.

A double line deepened between Lanyard's brows. His first guess had evidently been a poor one: the elapsed time proved that Morphey hadn't picked him up unconscious after the crash, hurried him in that condition back to New York, and caused him forthwith to be shanghaied.

"Seven months to be accounted for," he mused aloud—"seven months lost out of life!"

"Oh?"

None but a Briton could have infused so much cynic incredulity into one lonely syllable. In spite of himself Lanyard flushed.

"Oblige me, monsier, by believing that, between losing consciousness in that motor crash of November fifth, and regaining it after being thrown from a ladder half an hour ago, I remember nothing."

"Astonishin'."

"Even so, not—I believe—a case without precedent."

"Quite so."

"One is misled, then"—Lanyard's tone was as cold as his eye—"by an impression you give—no doubt without intention—of disbelief in my sincerity?"

The eyes of the Englishman winced, he coloured in his turn, but with anger more than with mortification to find his unmannerly attitude so directly challenged.

"My dear Mr. Duchemin!" he uncomfortably protested: "When you consider that one has seen a good deal of you in the last few days, talked with you, dined with you, played cards with you for hours at a time, and found you always a man of entirely collected mind, no different from the man one is conversin' with at this moment, perhaps you'll agree there's some excuse for one's bogglin' at a pretty tall tale on the face of it."

"It makes me very happy to accept your apology, monsieur." Gravely Lanyard watched the face of the surgeon burn a deeper red. "And on my part I am truly sorry to think I have put too great a strain upon your charity. Yet—you must let me assure you again—what I am telling you is the simple truth about conditions which I find profoundly disconcerting. I am afraid I shall need time to get my bearings, and I would be vastly grateful for assistance."

"By all means," the other said in a stifled voice—"I'm sure."

"It would help measurably to know what vessel this is . . ."

"The Port Royal—Monon Line."

"Ah! a fruit steamer, I take it?"

"Right: you took it for Nassau, Havana, Kingston, the Canal Zone, and Costa Rica."

"I think you said we were three days out? Then we ought to be not far from Nassau now."

"This gale has held us back a bit, but we ought to make port by daybreak tomorrow."

"One can send a cable there, of course . . ."

Either a mistrustful mind deceived Lanyard or the Englishman wasn't happy in his efforts to disguise a thrill of keen inquisitiveness.

"Of course; but why wait? Mean to say, there's our wireless at your service if you're keen to get some message off your mind, Mr. Duchemin."

"How stupid of me to forget." Lanyard's smile could be as charming as he chose, and he chose it to be entirely so just then, intent as he was on disarming one whom he had reason enough to think curiously hostile to him, in whose manner it was impossible to ignore an undercurrent of inexplicable animus. "But then you will be indulgent, remembering the circumstances. One question more, Doctor—?"

"Bright!" that person snapped curtly.

"Thank you. I am wondering . . . No doubt you saw me when or soon after I embarked?"

"Happened to be standin' by the head of the gang-plank when you came aboard, in point of fact."

"If you could tell me whether that event was marked by any unusual circumstances, such as might possibly shed light upon the riddle of why I came aboard at all—?"

"Sorry," the surgeon answered; "but you seemed to be quite peaceable."

"Nothing to lead you to suspect I wasn't in full command of my faculties?"

"Rather not."

"I was—alone?"

"Quite."

"Nobody to bid me bon voyage?"

"At least, I saw nobody."

"And my subsequent behaviour has been, I trust, discreet?"

"To the letter of the word. If you mean your smokin'-room habits, they've been above reproach—more than one can say of most Americans since the 'greatest country on God's green footstool' dried up."

"But I am not an American—"

"Never thought you were, Mr. Duchemin." Dr. Bright's sprained self-esteem was now convalescent. The eyes he bent on Lanyard were lambent with secret satisfaction, as if he knew something that Lanyard didn't, and found this proof of his superiority gratifying. "There's your name, for one thing. And then no American ever spoke such French. Saw enough service in France to know the true Parisian accent when I hear it."

"Indeed? So I have found occasion to speak French about this vessel?"

"Rather. You've been at it daily, and a good part of every day, with the attentions you've been payin' the pretty lady."

Lanyard's eyebrows went up alertly, and he didn't count the twinge that form of comment cost him.

"'Pretty lady'?"

"Madame la Comtesse de Lorgnes. At all events, that's her style on the passenger-list. Most fascinatin' and highly finished piece of work this tub has ever carried."

"Good to look at, you mean, monsieur?"

"Good to look at is a feeble way to put it. Every unattached male on board is balmy about her; and the attached ones aren't what one might call unconscious when she's in sight. And every man-jack loathes you like fun because the pretty lady has a hospitable eye and you haven't given anybody else a ghost of a look in."

"Beautiful and—shall we say—not ingénue, eh?"

"Look here," the Englishman knowingly laughed: "if you keep on guessin' so closely, I'll have to suspect your memory isn't as poor as you claim."

"It is true," Lanyard admitted with an air of perplexity, "that name, de Lorgnes, seems not unfamiliar. One wonders where, or when, one has heard it before, if possibly this lady is some friend of younger years . . ."

"Not this Comtesse de Lorgnes," Dr. Bright asserted in another turn of impertinence—"that is, unless the two of you have been playin' a game with me."

"Impossible, monsieur."

"Then you'll have to take my word for it—just as I took yours—you never met the lady before the first day out, when I had the honour of presentin' you—at her request."

"It must be an echo," Lanyard speculated—"that name—from some forgotten yesterday. I recall now

—it is odd, I think—the number of this stateroom fell spontaneously from my lips when the steward who picked me up asked for it.”

“Not really?” The surgeon had the laugh of one hugely entertained. “There’s another point you’ve overlooked, I fancy—your name, Duchemin. Feel quite at home with that, don’t you? You answer to it readily enough.”

“But naturally,” Lanyard returned with the utmost naïveté. “Why should I not, seeing it is my name?”

“Well! there you are. Cases of submerged identity always go by another name while their first personality is under the cloud. But you came aboard as André Duchemin, you admit you’re André Duchemin now; and I daresay you were André Duchemin at the time of that motor crash, what?”

“Monsieur is quite right.”

“That settles it, as I see it.” Conceit restored encouraged anew an attitude of exasperating patronage. “You’ll find it will all come back to you, everythin’ you’ve forgotten, bit by bit as the shock of your tumble wears off. It would be a damned interestin’ thing from a professional view point if this should turn out to be a true case of mislaid identity; but I’m afraid you needn’t hope for that.”

“Hope, monsieur!”

“Mean to say, you’ll find it’s somethin’ much more simple and elementary with you. You’ve had a bad fall and a rap on the head that recalls a similar mishap several months old, and for the time being everythin’ that happened in between seems to have been wiped

out. But I'll go bail it will all come back to you inside of twenty-four hours."

"Why twenty-four hours?"

"As soon as you've had a sound sleep, that is—same thing. Let me send you in a powder, and by dinner time you'll be ready to apologize for tryin' to take advantage of my innocent and trustin' nature. What do you say?"

Lanyard said that monsieur was too kind . . . "But a favour, my dear doctor," he added with a tolerably crest-fallen air. "We won't find it necessary to tell our fellow passengers what a sorry fraud I am, will we?"

"Oh! I won't be the one to expose you," Bright replied with vast pleasure in his ambiguity. "And you won't have a chance to tell on yourself before the sea goes down a bit. Meanin' to say, madam la comtesse is a poor sailor. But, you see, your anxiety not to be made a laughin' stock to her proves that your memory is improvin' every minute."

"One wastes time trying to deceive you," Lanyard admitted with humility. "But there is one thing, I believe, that might aid my recovery: a look at the passenger-list. Do you think you could by any chance find a copy for me?"

Contentment with his great cunning sustained this shock with poor grace: the surgeon frowned a frown of impatience mixed with mystification. Was it possible this chap still imagined he had found an easy dupe? However, one had to be diplomatic . . .

"Oh! very well," the surgeon said shortly. "I'll

have the steward bring you one with your sleeping powder. Though I must admit I don't quite see . . ."

Lanyard forgot to offer any explanation; and when the passenger-list had duly been delivered and scrutinized was obliged to confess that he had exerted himself to no purpose. "Madame la Comtesse de Lorgnes" was much too transparent an incognita for Liane Delorme; and the discovery that she was a fellow passenger had been excuse enough for the surmise that others of their common acquaintance might be keeping them company en voyage. But if such were the case, the printed list gave no clue, no other name that figured in it proved in the least degree stimulating, none suggested a likely alias for Morpew, or Pagan, or Mallison, or . . . Mrs. Folliott McFee . . .

Neither did anything reward his eager search for a name whose music was like an old song singing in one's heart.

The list slipped from his grasp and joined the surgeon's rejected sleeping powder on the floor. Lanyard lay with a face that mirrored pain more real than that which racked his head, blindly studying the play of rainbow gleams upon the painted ceiling.

Seven months lost beyond recall . . .

And Eye?

XVI

WITHIN the hour thought flagged for sheer weariness of beating to no purpose against that wall of oblivion whose featureless façade sequestered seven mortal months of forfeit yesterdays, nerves grew weary of the zooming wind, incessant slap and slash of broken water streaming down the side, the tuneless crooning of the engines: Lanyard slept.

A noise of light knuckles on the door awakened him when the afternoon was old and wind and sea had both abated, as the muting of their deep diapason affirmed and that horizontal beam of rusty light which bored in through the port to flail with slow and steady strokes the dusk whose blue it strengthened.

Without waiting to receive permission, Liane Delorme turned the knob and entered.

Most adept of actresses, she carried herself now with an air of delicate audacity that would have graced a virtuous lady of a sudden turned so venturesome as to call on a man in his lodgings alone. Almost anybody else it would surely have taken in, even Lanyard found himself for a moment at loss to account for this revolutionary innovation, a change of rôle made the more confounding by the fact that Liane had gone to the length of dressing it with garments of a semi-negligée sort whose circumspection, though they were

dainty and costly enough to delight any woman, was hardly akin to the spirit that sported them.

But one glimpse of Lanyard's eyes, one flash of their reclaimed intelligence, made plain the poverty of objective artifice as an aid to Liane's intentions. It indeed did more, it struck pale glints of panic from her own eyes, or something very like that emotion in the sight of one who knew as yet no reason why it should discountenance the woman to find him, whom she had sought of her own accord, awake and in his proper mind.

She held a dead wait with a hand on the door-knob behind her, the other unconsciously plucking at lace which, in this novel modesty of raiment, clothed chastely that bosom of fine fullness—dusky eyes quick in a face that wanted a shade or so of its habitually high illumination, lips a trace apart as if with a cry unsounded.

But the pause imposed by her illegible emotion was brief of life, with her next breath Liane recollected herself and, uttering a low sound of compassion crossed the room to kneel by the head of the berth.

"No, no, my friend!" She spoke in French, her arms lightly forced back to the pillow the shoulders which Lanyard was lifting. "Rest tranquil—with that poor head! Thou dost still suffer greatly, my old one?"

Lanyard mumbled a dashed negative with lips that were muffled, before he could object, by lips ardent and tender, whose clinging intimacy he escaped at length only by moving his head aside.

Happily, that movement excited only a grumble of pain, entirely bearable; he was able to muster a smile by way of redressing the rebuff.

"I say!" he remonstrated in his most British English—"we are getting on, rather—aren't we?"

The woman drew back sharply and, half-kneeling, half resting on her heels, showed a face sad with reproach. "Hast thou forgotten, then?"

"More than I guessed, going on this bit of business, my dear." Lanyard was firm in his stand against French; it was easier to be unsentimental in sound Anglo-Saxon, a tongue that enabled one to avoid using the too personal "thou" without administering an affront unpardonable. "What bothers me most is this," he proceeded in querulous vein, a self-conscious smile accounting for his neglect of the stricken eyes staring into his: "I've remembered and forgotten much too much, all at once. It's damned discouraging—you may be interested to know—to wake up from what amounted to a sound long nap and find that seven perfectly useful months have been stolen while one slept."

"It is true, then, what I feared!"

"Afraid it is, Liane, if what you feared was that a blow on the head had bumped my right mind back to its throne."

Slowly and with a bitter smile the woman repeated the English phrase: "'A blow on the head!' . . ."

"That's what did the trick for me—and I don't mind telling you it hurt like the devil."

"But what of the blow to my heart?" Her closed

hand smote Liane's breast. "You complain with reason of having been robbed of seven months of memory; but what of me, who stand to lose seven months of memories?"

"Pardon?" Lanyard queried, politely dense.

"You loved me well in that time while you were your old, true self."

"Loved you, Liane? And forgot! Ah, no! you ask me to believe too much."

"You jest—and my heart is breaking!"

"It's no joke to forget an experience like that, something which one man in a million would be lucky to know once in his lifetime."

"One in a million!"

"I beg your pardon: I was counting in your unsuccessful lovers as well."

"But this is too much!"

With an abrupt movement the woman started up, to pause with face averted and hands fast laced. As promptly Lanyard tumbled out of the berth.

"Forgive me, Liane," he said contritely. "I daresay I am a bit light-headed, it would be surprising if I weren't, considering that I've experienced something of a shock today, and not by any means a physical shock merely—and am still shaken from it. You can hardly demand rational behaviour of a revenant lately spewed back into life by a psychic earthquake. That it was a strictly private earthquake doesn't make its after-effects any the less unsettling."

"True: it is you rather who have me to forgive." With a spontaneous generosity that shamed him, Liane

swung back to Lanyard and caught both his hands to her bosom. "In my sadness and pain I forget you cannot understand . . ."

"Then make me understand. I've no one else to look to—and it would be unkindness to leave me in the dark."

"But give me time to consider . . ." She let go his hands and sank into the room's one chair. "It is going to hurt me to tell you, Michael, even more than it will hurt you."

"And how is that?"

"Because, I think" . . . She studied him a while with troubled gaze . . . "I think you have gone back to the ways of thought that were yours seven months ago."

"And what is so deplorable in that? Ways of thought about what?"

The woman leaned forward to bend her head to his in confidence, but gave a slight start instead and drew back with a veering glance, as if disturbed by some noise unheard by Lanyard, then laid a finger to her lips, sprang up lightly, and went to the port to look out. From this, in agreeable disappointment, she crossed back to the door, inclining to it an attentive ear for some seconds before opening it furtively to peer out, and concluding the performance with an expression of alarms allayed.

"I was mistaken," she announced, shooting the bolt—"there is nobody."

"Madame la comtesse was expecting—?"

She gave her head a shake of irritation excited by

his levity, and without warning whipped from the folds of her *négligé* an automatic pistol, which she pressed into Lanyard's hand regardless of his efforts to refuse it."

"No, take it—take it, I say, while there is time."

"But what the deuce—!"

"Take it, I tell you—you may need it soon." And then as Lanyard humoured her for the sake of peace, she proceeded with every appearance of offering a complete explanation: "That dolt of a doctor told me you were unarmed."

"Bright? But how does he know? And why should he care?"

"Your effects were searched this morning, while you were at breakfast, and the steward who picked you up after your fall took the trouble to find out that you had no weapon about you."

"Thoughtful of all hands, I'm sure!" Lanyard muttered in amazement. "But do tell me what I have done to deserve so much respect?"

"Presently," Liane promised in a hushed voice. She moved nearer and held out an open hand. "No!" she insisted, and brusquely brushed aside the pistol when he tried to return it—"the necklace! Give me that now—we can come to an explanation later. Let me hide it away before they come to put you under arrest—they may, at any moment."

"Indeed?" Impatience with all this, as it seemed, determined effort to mystify him to no end, resulted in the pistol being flung into the berth, and peremptory imprisonment of the woman's wrists. "Now!" Lan-

yard demanded—"come to your senses, Liane, be intelligible if you can. Why should I be in danger of arrest? What is this necklace you are raving about?"

"Give it to me first—"

"I know nothing of any necklace."

"You have forgotten; nevertheless, you have it. You told me you would never let it leave your person, you must have it hidden somewhere about you now. Find and give it to me before it is too late."

Her agitation was too truly rendered to seem put on for a purpose; and though he had not the least inkling of its cause, Lanyard reflected that in those seven months anything might have happened, the amplest reason might all too possibly exist for the distress of mind which Liane was so vividly portraying. Half-persuaded, he released her wrists and, stepping back, ran the hands of old cunning through his garments, locating every spot which in former days he had been accustomed to use as a temporary cache for purloined property—and drawing every one blank. Winding up with a shrug of fatigued incredulity: "There is nothing," he declared shortly. "Now be so kind—"

"Nothing!" Consternation rang in that guarded cry. "They must have it already, then, they must have searched you and found it while you slept! The doctor spoke of having given you a sleeping powder—enough, he said, to keep you quiet till morning."

"I didn't take it."

"They must have thought you had, or you wouldn't have been left unwatched, I would have found it im-

possible to see you. You have been asleep?" Lanyard nodded. "You have slept all afternoon, and soundly?" He confessed that he had. Liane subsided, crushed by despair, upon the cushioned transom beneath the port. "It was the same to them as if you had taken their drug—the opportunity they needed. Now they have found the necklace—you are lost!"

"But I have often been 'lost' in my life," Lanyard retorted, unmoved more than by impatience with this everlasting beating about the bush. "And at present I feel less lost than quite newly found, and so prefer to think myself—until, at least, you consent to become more coherent."

Beneath the sheer silk perfect shoulders stirred disconsolately. "There is nothing one can do now—one can only wait."

"Let me recommend you to study myself, then: to my mind, a perfect pattern of patience."

Lanyard offered the cigarettes in an unfamiliar case which he had found in his pockets, and when they were disdained philosophically helped himself, while the woman sat glowering at the door as if to wither the object of her spite, wherever he might lurk beyond those walls.

"That animal of a doctor! how dare he be so sly with me and at the same time such an imbecile?"

"Oh, very well!" said Lanyard, settling into the chair: "by all means let us begin with that good Dr. Bright. What has he done?"

"He came to me an hour ago, Michael, to put me on my guard against you."

"Considerate beggar. But do go on . . ."

"The idiot would like to make love to me. He thought he might worm into my good graces by warning me to keep an eye on my jewels, since it has transpired that you were the Lone Wolf."

"And since when has that transpired—?"

"He told me that the captain had been advised by wireless, early this morning, to keep you under observation until we arrive at Nassau; where officers will board the vessel with a warrant for your arrest."

"Something to do with the missing necklace, of course."

"You're wanted in New York for stealing it. Your last great coup, my friend—and you bungled it!"

"I did? Then I trust devoutly you are right, it was my last. From what you hint, Liane, I would seem to have been leading a busy life of late. If you would only be a little less vague . . ."

"If I hesitate to speak plainly," the woman gently reminded him, "it is because you are dear to me, Michael, I find it not easy to say anything that will give you pain."

"Console yourself by observing that I am prepared. You have told me so much already, a word here and a hint there, I could almost foretell this revelation you shrink from making." Lanyard shot a quizzical grin through cigarette smoke. "I am accused of stealing a valuable necklace and making such an unworkman-like job of it that I had to fly the States incognito. It would further appear that I wasn't very clever about making my escape, since my presence aboard this ves-

sel is known and steps have been taken by the authorities to have me detained at her first port of call. For all of which, I presume, I have to thank that perservering hater of mine—and friend of yours—Morphew. What a memory the man must have! what a genius for bearing a grudge!”

“All that is good guesswork and substantially true”—the woman nodded regretfully—“all but your suspicions of Morphew. There you are wrong: he had nothing to do with this affair, Michael, it is all of your own contriving.”

“You tell me that,” Lanyard laughed—“and in the same breath that I am ‘dear’ to you! It’s no good, Liane: you can’t be Morphew’s friend and mine.”

“I tell you nothing but what of a certainty and my own knowledge I know. Morphew is nothing to me, you are everything; notwithstanding, your suspicions do him an injustice—he would have saved you in New York had you permitted. But you wouldn’t listen to me when I prayed you to accept his offer of intervention . . .”

“That at least one finds easy to believe.”

“And even now he would be your friend—yours as well as mine—if you would consent: Morphew stands prepared to save you yet, if we can find a way to slip through their fingers who await you at Nassau.”

“But tell me how . . .”

“The last thing before we sailed, Morphew sent Peter Pagan to promise me, if I could persuade you to go ashore at Nassau and apply to his factors there, the agents who have charge of his bootlegging interests

in the Bahamas, he would have us both conveyed secretly to France, in his own yacht."

"Truly?" Lanyard laughed again, flipped his cigarette through the port, and sat up. "How charming of the man—but how strange! Who would ever suspect that rude and unlovely exterior disguised so much goodness and simplicity of heart?"

"You laugh because you do not trust me," Liane sullenly complained. "I have for months devoted myself to you—this is my reward!"

"Prove me ungrateful, my dear," Lanyard lightly offered—"prove me skeptical without sound cause and provocation—and you can ask nothing of me that I will refuse you in testimony to my penitence."

A stare of new intensity enveloped him. He saw her countenance overcast with petulance, an odd frame for eyes of singular wistfulness.

"You are wrong to tempt me with such a promise . . ."

"Why?" Lanyard parried. "Are you afraid of the test? or that I won't make good my word?"

"What makes me hesitate is fear lest you try to make your word good against your will. It's your love I want, Michael, not your duty—another name for hatred!"

"Do you truly believe you'd find me so contemptible, Liane? You should know me better than that."

"I know men better than you do, my dear friend; and when all's said, I know, you are but little different from any other; only, it is my lot to see you different . . ."

"Believe me," Lanyard began in some constraint, "I am not insensible—"

"No! say nothing now. When you have heard me out it shall be for you to say then whether or not I deserve better than mockery from you. But I prophesy you will end by forgetting the fine promise you have just now made . . ."

Impressed against his bias, Lanyard gave a nod and nothing more; and then, seeing that she still faltered as if distressed by his direct attention, he crossed to the port and stood with his lean, worn face ruddled by the sun's last rays.

It was going down in a flaming welter of rose and gold beyond a violet smudge to starboard, a blind loom of land at a distance difficult to guess, because of the glare, though its relative nearness was manifest in the moderate sea that was running in its lee, all that was left to tell of that morning's fury; for while Lanyard looked, a small schooner swam astern, midway between the steamer and that dim shore, with slatting sails all black against the glare that burned the waters . . .

"Proceed, then," Lanyard prompted at length, watching the sun dip and vanish.

The woman's voice responded in a weary key from out the shadow at his elbow: "First of all, you must know you were mistaken about Mallison. He was a wretch, I don't dispute, capable of any infamy you please; but it was not he who made away with Folly's emeralds."

"You say that, no doubt, because he contrived to

establish some sort of an alibi that resulted in his acquittal."

"He was never tried, he was granted liberty under bail and disappeared."

"And you reckon that proof of his innocence? Or is one to understand you absolve the fellow on Morphew's say-so?"

"But on your own, Michael."

"Mine!"

"You can not know everything you confided to me after your accident; the many curious secrets you told me, such as that you remembered clearly having broken into Folly's and stolen her emeralds, beside yourself as you were that night with drink, and rebellious into the bargain against a social order that kept you poor and so forbade your marrying Madame de Montalais."

The brief sub-tropic twilight was ebbing fast, night was sweeping swiftly over the face of the waters to blot out the last lingering souvenir of the routed sun. Lanyard looked down as it were into a well of gloom in which a blur of spectral pallor swam, source of those accents which were enunciating proofs of an intimacy with his mind and heart that passed all believing.

"I told you that!"

A low unhappy laugh floated up to him: "But more!"

"Under what circumstances?"

"Let me go back to the beginning. . . . The night after that rencontre of yours with Mallison, Morphew dined me at the Abbaye, another of his establishments

where the maître-d'hôtel happened to be a protégé of mine from Paris of pre-War days—but Morpew knew nothing about that. He had just finished telling how you had humiliated him before Folly, and was making my blood curdle with threats to be revenged—O but you were wrong to make an enemy of that one, Michael!—when he was called to the telephone. He came back grinning hideously, and said his agents reported having traced you and Madame de Montalais to the Inn of the Green Woods. You would never, Morpew boasted, return to New York the same man. I tried to wheedle him into disclosing his mind, but he was too wary, I learned nothing; and the best I could manage was to bribe my maître-d'hôtel, as soon as Morpew's back was turned again, to try to get a warning through to you by telephone. Then I made believe to be indisposed, got rid of Morpew, and engaged an automobile I had used before. . . . Never, my friend, shall I forget that ride! not even that night of our flight to Cherbourg from Paris its equal for wildness . . . if you remember . . .”

A hand found Lanyard's in the mirk and clasped it tightly. He suffered it, replying simply: “I remember.”

“Let me tell you, Michael, when we swung wide to clear your automobile by the roadside, and that other in which Morpew's people were pursuing you came hurtling toward us like a juggernaut gone mad, I did not hope to live another minute. As it turned out, my hired car came through with a crumpled fender for all damage. It was the other cannoned off and turned turtle in the ditch. The men in it escaped somehow

with their lives, though they crawled back to the road too badly shaken to be dangerous. I left them trying to fit a tyre from their wrecked car to yours, and took you and Madame de Montalais back to New York with me. She had wrenched an ankle falling into the ditch when you threw her off the road, and was unable to walk; otherwise she had come to no harm. But you—it seemed a miracle you lived . . .

“You had your right arm and two ribs broken, and a great gash in your head—you’ll find the scar under your hair. The surgeons said it meant concussion of the brain, you might survive but never could be your mental self again. It was two months before you were able to talk connectedly, more than a few words at a time. I took you to my apartment from the hospital, and myself nursed you through your convalescence. As it progressed, one saw that mentally as well as bodily your recovery would be complete—it was your spirit had been wounded beyond repair. All your old vivacity was gone, Michael, you never laughed; you seemed fond of having me near you, but fonder still of being solitary, sitting all alone with your black thoughts, brooding . . .

“Madame de Montalais came to see you daily. She, too, was quick to observe the change. I never knew what passed between you, naturally; but that you were neither of you happy it was easy to perceive. One day she called when I was out; I met her, leaving, as I returned—she had been weeping. She never called again. Not long after, her name appeared in the newspapers as one of the notables sailing on the Paris for France . . .”

The voice in the darkness ran out, Lanyard's hand was freed, a long pause was filled with the throbbing of the engines, the hiss and suck of water down the side, the mellow calling of the ship's bell.

In dull abstraction Lanyard counted its strokes: seven bells, half past seven o'clock.

The port, a square of ultramarine let into a blank black wall, framed a nocturne, silken swells with dusky bosoms stung by starlight, on the nearest point of land a great red constant star following the progress of the steamer with unfriendly stare, somewhat astern another of sardonic green, far ahead, low upon the horizon, a third, more volatile, winking white and white. . . . A thought like flotsam drifted with the dark tide of despond: A long swim to either light, even for a man in his prime

Lanyard heard flat metallic tones pronounce: "Continue, if you please"—and realized that he had heard himself speaking.

"You never told me what had happened, but I was soon able to guess. A day or so later—I remember, it was the first day when you were permitted to walk about a bit—you opened your heart to me in a way I hadn't looked for, and made mine very sad for you. You told me how your memory of that affair at Folly's had become clear and positive, somehow, in sequence to your accident, and had satisfied you there could be no profit for any man in contending against his nature, the arbiter of his fate. Nature, you said, had formed you a thief and an enemy of society—you had grown resigned to give over struggling to be other than as you

had been made. I told you, no matter what you might do, I would always be your friend—more, if you would. You were sweet to me that night, Michael, without committing yourself to definite promises; but the next day you disappeared. I was out for the afternoon, and neither of the maids saw you leave. You took nothing with you but the clothing you wore. I neither saw nor heard from you for many weeks. But New York did . . .”

Lanyard all at once swung round, caught the seated woman roughly by her shoulders, by main strength lifted her to her feet, and with hard eyes searched the face revealed by the dull blue glimmer seeping in through the port.

“Is this the truth you are telling me, Liane?”

Pliant and passive in his hands, she answered: “The whole truth, Michael.”

“You swear it?”

“By the love I bear you.”

With a mutter of apology he released her, and silently, like a figure of fair marble sinking into a pool of ink, the pale shade of her subsided through the shadows, lost definition, and rested as before.

“I am listening . . .”

“It didn’t take the newspapers long to guess the Lone Wolf was at work again. In quick succession, Michael, you consummated a series of exploits that beggared the most lurid chapters of your old Parisian days.”

“How can you say it was I?”

“You confessed to me yourself—”

"Be careful, Liane!"

"I tell you only the truth as I had it from your own lips. If you are loath to hear . . ."

"Forgive me."

"You came to me in my apartment without warning one midnight; at your wits' ends, police snapping at your heels, you turned to me! That made me happy, Michael. . . . But it was no easy task to hide you, when rewards of more than fifty thousand dollars were being advertised for your arrest, and every Boy Scout in the land was carrying a copy of your photograph—"

"But I have never been photographed in my life except for passport purposes during the War; and my appearance today is not as it was then, I no longer wear a beard—"

"You nevertheless had recently been photographed by flashlight, in the act of opening a safe in the Stuyvesant Ashe home. Some ingenious member of the household, in anticipation of the Lone Wolf's visit, had rigged up a camera commanding the safe and a flashlight to be set off by electric current when the door was tampered with. You were caught at close range, facing the camera as you knelt with your ear to the safe door, listening to its mechanism. The likeness was exact and unmistakeable; and all the papers reproduced it to further the hue and cry."

"You tell me that happened—and ask me to believe the Lone Wolf left that house without wrecking the camera!"

"To the contrary you destroyed *a* camera utterly; but there were two, the ingenuity of the inventor had

been equal to that contingency—one carefully concealed, the other where you might find it without too much trouble.”

Lanyard had an unpleasant laugh in his throat. “Decidedly he was right who said a reformed crook could never come back! If I was the dupe of so cheap a trick . . . But to resume: I appealed to you—to a woman!—to stand between me and the police. . . . Ask them to believe that who once hunted the Lone Wolf across Europe and back again—and failed to catch him! . . . Well and good! what then?”

“The chase struck a false scent and passed us by; but from that time on you made your home with me. It was safe, that had been proved; and I was useful to you.”

“How useful?”

“You had got together a collection of jewellery difficult to dispose of without courting arrest; also, you would have found it impracticable to take care of large sums of money such as this sale realized. I saw to all that for you: through Morphew I found a way to market the jewels, and in my own name I carried your funds in a separate account with my bankers.”

“And I still called myself the Lone Wolf!”

“I think you were learning to be less jealous of your loneliness, Michael. You had learned—as most men do at some stage of life—that there was one woman at least whose devotion would never fail you.”

“I used to know the Lone Wolf well: a strange belief for him to hold!”

“But life had forged yet another bond between us . . .”

The vibrations of Liane's words died upon a suppliant silence. It grew long while in her hearing the pulsing of the engines aped the tempo of a funeral march. Lanyard made no move or sound. Vision tempered to the gloom and made keen by hunger saw his face, its salient lines picked out by gleams of deflected starlight, steadfast to the port, inscrutably set.

If he would not speak she must . . .

"I loved you well, and love comes of loving . . . of being loved . . ."

"You wish me to understand," Laynard bluntly translated, "I became your lover."

"Yes."

"Yet you knew I loved Madame de Montalais—"

"You swore to me all that was finished."

"And you believed—?"

"I wanted to."

Another silence spun itself into minutes charged with emotion pent and mute. The woman felt rather than saw the sign of a hand that bade her resume. But her tongue stumbled, she was breathless with misgivings . . .

"What more do you wish me to say, Michael?"

"There is more to tell, surely, a hiatus to be filled in between that time and this." But still she faltered till he added in enforced patience: "I have yet to learn what brings us together aboard this vessel."

"Your own vanity must answer for that, Michael. . . . You had been several weeks inactive, the newspaper sensation had begun to blow over, we were planning to return to Paris—though you balked at

becoming indebted to Morpew for the forged passports he offered to secure. Then, one day, the Chief of Police gave out an interview exalting himself at your expense; and in that quaint, excitable temper, which you had nursed ever since the motor accident, exasperated beyond reason, you vowed to expose the man's incompetence, and did—breaking into his home and making off with a necklace of diamonds which he had just presented to his wife. But somehow you must have blundered, or your luck had turned: you hardly escaped being caught, and left your path of flight so plainly marked it led the police to my very door. We had to fly New York between two suns, with no choice but to seek refuge in some country that did not require passports. This steamer was the first that sailed for South America; we secured passage, came aboard separately, and pretended to be strangers till that officious doctor insisted on presenting you as my fellow-countryman."

"And now"—Lanyard demanded of himself more than of the woman—"what?"

"If you would only consent to listen to me . . ."

"By what you tell me, Liane, the experience would be anything but a novel one for you."

"Morpew remains my good friend—"

"Permit me to wish you joy of him."

"And is willing for my sake to be yours."

"Unfortunately, I have the prejudice to be loved for my own blue eyes or not at all."

"I am not suspected, it would be a simple matter for me to send a wireless, in a code which Morpew gave

me, to his factors at Nassau. They might easily manage some mishap for the men who wait there for you; or failing that, arrange an escape for you subsequent to your arrest—”

“Make your mind at ease on that account, Liane: I don’t mean to be arrested.”

“So much the better. Morphew maintains a secret base on one of the outlying cays of the Bahamas, where his boats rendezvous with those that fetch the liquor from overseas. With the aid of his factors, it should be an easy matter to smuggle you out to that base and on board some British vessel homeward bound.”

“Many thanks! but I shall earn my salvation without the aid of Morphew’s lot, or never. Moreover, I have no wish to see England again till I am able to go there openly and disembark in the sunlight, wearing my own face and name—Michael Lanyard.”

“But that can never be!”

“In that event, I must end my days in America.”

“But are you truly mad enough to imagine there could be any way—?”

“There is but one course possible for me: I must find my way back to New York—under my own power, as the saying runs—and make reparation for the evil I have done—”

“Nothing of that was done by you in your right mind, Michael.”

“Pardon: but it seems a nice question, which mind of mine, today’s or yesterday’s, is ‘right’. Neither do I think Society will be disposed to split hairs concern-

ing my liability for acts committed whilst my intelligence was—constructively, at least—under a cloud. Nor, for that matter, am I: if I may not clear the name of Michael Lanyard or wipe out the score against him, I have little use—no, none—for the liberty of André Duchemin.”

In uncontrollable disquietude, the woman rose. “What do you propose, then?”

“I have made no plan.”

“If you won’t have Morphey’s help—”

“My dear Liane: that ‘if’ of yours is downright, voluptuous redundancy.”

“But we are due at Nassau at dawn, the police will board us with the pilot boat—!”

“Eight bells just sounded; it should be daybreak by four o’clock, at this season. In other words, I command eight hours of darkness. And the Lone Wolf that lives on in Michael Lanyard, let me tell you, is hardly the half-witted cur you have sketched for me, who cowered behind a woman’s skirts in terror of American police.”

Discovering Liane’s arms about him, her face strained up to him, Lanyard caught himself up sharply, shrugged, and wagged a long-suffering head: “My dear Liane!”

She said in a sob: “You do not mean it—”

“But very truly, my dear.”

“Yesterday your dear, today less than the dust—!”

“You are mistaken. I owe you too much—”

“You will never repay it now. Did I not foretell that, when I had told you everything, you would for-

get your pledge to me? 'Prove me ungrateful'—out of your own mouth, Michael!—'and you can ask nothing of me I will refuse to do in testimony to my penitence.' "

Still unresisting in her embrace, he asked: "And I am already proved ungrateful in your sight?"

"Do you not mean to forsake me, put me by now I am of no more use?"

"I have not said so."

"What else do you intend, when you tell me of your determination to go back to New York?"

"One must first pay one's debts—"

"Then the debt you owe my love and devotion stands second to the debt you owe self-love?"

"Say, rather, self-respect; wanting that, no man can claim to deserve any woman's love. Let me first of all settle my reckoning with Society—"

"There will be nothing of you left for me!"

"In one breath you urge me to hold myself blameless for wrongs done to others that I don't remember, in the next you call me to account for obligations to you incurred under the same conditions."

"I am not concerned with consistency, Michael, but with love. You have made yourself too dear to me, even though you didn't know what you were doing—I can't go on without you now. You hold your dream of honesty dear; do not deny me my dream of decency. Back there in New York we joined our lives, outlaw and outcast; we must go on together or forego all hope for all time. Give me at least the fair chance you ask for yourself...."

Her prayers ran out in a mumble under a hand which gently closed her mouth; ears not deaf to them had been quick none the less to pick up footfalls in the passageway. Now in the hush that fell the knob of the stateroom door rattled, the door itself creaked to the pressure of a shoulder, someone swore indignantly beyond it, and immediately a knock weighted with authority resounded on its panels.

In the panting bosom pressed to his Lanyard felt the heart leap and flutter wildly. To a whisper of dismay, "They have come for you already!" he returned with calm: "Never fear—they shan't get me."

The summons was repeated.

"What can you do?" Liane breathed.

"Nothing so long as I am not free to move."

Her arms fell away, but her hands lingered upon his shoulders. In the passage several men were confabulating in mutters dulled by the intervening door. One became articulate in vexation: "I tell you, he didn't get enough dope in that powder to make him sleep like this!"

Again Liane's whisper: "What shall we do?"

Lanyard considered: "We can't keep them out . . . may as well let them in."

"But you said you wouldn't give yourself up—"

"No more do I mean to."

The knuckles of authority drummed on for a moment. When they ceased Lanyard was hailed right cheerily: "I say, Mr. Duchemin wake up, let me in! It's I, Dr. Bright. Don't you hear me?"

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"But Michael!" the whisper implored him—"you can't stand off the whole ship!"

"Why did you bring me that pistol, then?"

"Not in anticipation of anything like this—"

"Don't worry: I shan't use it. I've a better plan. I count on you: stand by to draw the bolt when I give the word."

Lanyard watched the dim shape of Liane fall back to the door. Bright was yapping with a Judas tongue, bidding him open in the sacred name of fellowship. With the thick enunciation of one just wakened from the deep sweet sleep of an innocent Lanyard responded: "Half a minute! What's the row?" Then more quietly—"Ready, Liane?"

"Yes, but—"

"Fall back behind the door when you open it."

No time-wasting preparations to make, only a dressing gown to shrug out of: he stood in shirt and trousers, shoeless.

"Now!"

As the bolt grated, Lanyard set a foot upon the transom, a hand to the sill of the window-port, and lifted himself nimbly through that narrow outlet, dropping to the deck on feet as furtive as a cat's.

For an instant he stood glancing alertly forward, aft, and over the rail. The deck was deserted, a solitary coast light abeam blinked forlornly, a minute spark lost beyond a measureless waste of grim black water. Dubiously Lanyard considered it: a pull to daunt the heart of the boldest swimmer . . .

The dark port behind him turned into a square of

staring amber. Through it broke a din of voices blasphemous in anger and disappointment. Lanyard darted aft.

The watch on the afterdeck witnessed the plunge of a dark body from the rail of the promenade deck down over the side. A man who appeared at the same rail an instant later lifted up a voice of authentic seafaring whine:

"Man oo-verboard!"

The watch took up the cry.

XVII

SEA-WISE Bahaman correspondents of American press services were of one mind concerning Lanyard's disappearance from the Port Royal, arguing that the known conditions of time and tide ruled it out of all consideration as a sane attempt at escape. The stories they cabled North were accordingly published, for the most part, under headlines something in this sense :

LONE WOLF SUICIDES AT SEA

Lanyard, these reports related, had gone overboard, rather than submit to arrest, after dark of a moonless night, when the Port Royal was standing into North-east Providence Channel, her position being approximately midway between its jaws. Thus, if he dreamed to win to land either in the North, where Hole-in-the-Wall Lighthouse sentinels the southernmost point of Great Abaco Island, or in South, where Egg Island Light warns of the perils lying off the northerly tip of Eleuthera, the fugitive had undertaken a ten-mile pull against the drag of the strong offshore current which was setting through the channel at the time; a task which must have thwarted the stoutest effort of the strongest swimmer, even assuming that the sharks with which those waters swarm had been content to let him pass unmolested. Something which, the consensus

maintained, in the case of Lanyard, the sharks indisputably hadn't.

That cry of "Man overboard!" had brought the Port Royal to a prompt and a dead halt; the waters roundabout had been lavishly sown with ring-buoys as well as with floating flares, guided by whose weird illumination a life-boat quartered the theatre of the mystery for upwards of an hour before the steamer called it in and proceeded. Nevertheless the authorities who boarded her at Nassau, in their disappointment indisposed to accept the suicide theory, insisted on a thorough rummage of the vessel which accomplished little toward hushing the murmurs of dissatisfaction with which, at length and empty-handed, they took themselves ashore.

These doubters had at least one confrère of weathered judgment in New York, who gave free tongue to his conviction that the Lone Wolf was one wise bird and a tough fish to drown. And the faith of this one in the will-to-live animating the hybrid monstrosity of his figure had good justification in the outcome, when, one night more than a month after the event of the alleged suicide, a glare beating directly into his face roused him from the slumbers of an honest man to find that some marauder had added the cool isolence of switching on the bedside lamp to the felonious injury of housebreaking.

One who in his time had done much to make life a misery to men of wicked ways, and more than once had figured as the target of an assassin's weapon, the householder had long been accustomed to sleep with a

pistol ready to his hand. But his instinctive fumble for it drew a blank this time; so, with such composure as he could command, he turned attention to the agent of its confiscation.

This person had cheekily drawn up a chair to the bedside and made himself at home in it, one of the detective's cigars between his teeth and a highball of the detective's precious pre-Prohibition Scotch in his hand testifying to amiable readiness to be sociable, provided his host had no real objection to advance.

A semi-blinded stare was met by a smile that flashed teeth of notable whiteness in a face deeply bronzed where it didn't boast a lush overgrowth of beard. This last was sparsely shot with grey, and so was hair that also wanted shearing; but the rich complexion of the miscreant was clear, his eyes were luminous with vitality, he had in every particular the look of one who had consorted long and profitably with Nature in her least sophisticated phases. As for his costume, it was altogether shocking, comprising simply a cotton singlet, a coat without much definite shape or colour, a pair of ragged trousers belted with an end of rope, and foot-gear that would have kindled the envy of a slapstick clown of the cinema.

"Well!" the detective summed up his scrutiny—"if that front didn't make you the spit of the devil, I'd lay long odds you were none other than my poor dear pal, the late Mike Angelo Lanyardi."

"It isn't sporting to bet on a certainty," the guest severely pointed out. "And I'm sorry you think I'm late, my good Crane; but I'd rather far be that than never."

"It would be a whole lot healthier for you to be never, in this neck-o'-the-woods. If you haven't got sense enough to stay put in your watery grave—"

"How shall an unquiet spirit withstand the temptation thus to revisit these glimpses of the moonshine?" Lanyard sipped his drink with unaffected relish. "Prime stuff, my friend! and I will be glad to fetch you its fellow if you'll only be nice and forget for a time you're a limb of the law whose sworn duty it is to pinch out of hand revisitants, like me, from another and a wetter world."

"The devil himself couldn't twist the King's English into such ornery knots," Crane declared. "I'm convinced: it is indeed the Lone Wolf who lurks behind those lovely whiskers."

"You may be right," Lanyard admitted. "Unhappily, I for one can't altogether share your certainty."

Crane made nothing of that, so let it pass. "Such behind the case," he pursued, "a man-size slug of Scotch would be some solace to my conscience."

"On your promise to be peaceable?" Lanyard stipulated, rising.

"Speaking as one who has seen you act up when your sense of self-preservation was hitting on all six, I don't mind passing you my word, you're in no danger of my starting any rukus without a gun."

"Or with one, I trust very truly."

"If you'd had the common decency to trust me at all, I wouldn't be missing my gat this minute."

"Common decency not being the same thing, one takes it, as common sense?"

"You don't have to worry," Crane insisted with an air of some aggrievance. "If I can't round you up without a gun, you can run loose and wild for all of me."

"On that understanding, then . . ." Lanyard tossed the weapon back to the bed. "Forgive a simple precaution not inspired by any real doubt of your good disposition toward an old friend, or your sporting attitude toward a professional antagonist . . ."

The broad of his back was a shining mark for Crane as he strode away to an adjoining room, where he made a light, and from which he presently returned with a box of cigars and a musical glass.

Crane had not stirred. The pistol rested where it had fallen. Lanyard tendered the drink and the open box.

"Astonishing," he mused, "what a sound taste in cigars one finds prevalent among members of a venal and brutalized constabulary!"

He remarked in pained astonishment that the bed was quaking with Crane's silent mirth.

"Don't mind me!" the detective protested: "it's myself I'm giving the laugh, not you. I've been figuring for some time now, you were about due to stage a gaudy resurrection; but this beats my craziest notions of what the show would be like. I'm a pretty old mule of a dick, and a tough audience for trick stuff, but I've got to hand it to you, Lanyard: I've never yet been able to dope out what your next dodge would be nor how you'd pull it. So, whenever you get all set to explain what the hell you mean by sitting

there and looking like that—well, you needn't be afraid I'll walk out on you."

"You don't like my make-up?" Lanyard drew a long face over his vestments. "Do you know? I rather fancied it. These jibs seem so appropriate to my newly adopted calling. Behold in me, if you please, my dear Crane, a seafaring man fully three weeks of age."

"That leaves a couple to be accounted for, then, since the night you took to the big drink."

"There were two weeks before I became what I am," Lanyard confessed, "when, not to put too fine a point on it, I was purely and beautifully a beachcomber in those enchanting Bahamas."

"I've got a hunch this is going to be good." Crane grinned luxuriously through cigar-smoke. "At least, I don't imagine you've got the crust to think you stand any show of getting whatever it is you want out of me, without coming through with a full account of yourself from then right up to now."

"A stipulation of quid pro quo is always reasonable and in order," Lanyard agreed. "Yet I am afraid you may find my story a poor exchange for what I wish to learn from you, my friend . . ."

"It's your risk. Shoot."

"You are wondering how I eluded the authorities at Nassau? That was elementary. . . . On the other hand, one must admit one was dealing, aboard the *Port Royal*, with gentry of small experience and less imagination. . . . When I left my stateroom by way of its window, I found myself with scant stomach for a

long swim in black water: it needs the hot blood of youth to contemplate without a qualm adventures like that. There was a deck-chair nearby, and in it somebody's steamer-rug; I folded up the one in the other, and cast them overboard. In the darkness they passed for the shape of a man to startled eyes on the main deck below; nobody questioned the alarm I raised of 'Man overboard!' There was much excitement then; but other than the ship's officers, nobody knew the unfortunate was a notorious criminal trying to evade arrest, nobody else was looking for André Duchemin—and I was careful enough to make myself insignificant. When the boat was lowered to scour the seas for me, all hands honoured the performance with undivided attention, it was easy to take refuge in one of the life-boats swung inboard on its davits on the opposite side of the deck; I wormed my way in under the canvas cover and lay snug till the Port Royal took the pilot aboard outside Nassau and with him the police agents. It was still quite dark; and as the blood-hounds swarmed up one side, the Lone Wolf dropped down the opposite, unseen. There were a number of vessels riding at anchor in the roadstead, and when I had put a good distance between myself and the Port Royal I picked out a little schooner of unkempt appearance, climbed aboard her while the anchor-watch snored, and hid myself in her hold."

Lanyard paused to puff his cigar into a glow, and chuckled. "That was a sorry shift, out of the frying-pan into the fire for the poor old Lone Wolf. . . . The schooner turned out to be a rum-runner. Her



The Lone Wolf Returns.
A Columbia Pictures Corporation Production.
LANYARD WALKS COMPLACENTLY FROM UNDER THE VERY NOSE OF THE POLICE.

owners had put into Nassau for a night's carouse. In the morning they came aboard, weighed anchor, and set sail. When I reckoned the time ripe to declare myself, a jury of noble headaches sat on my case, decided that a stowaway with so lame a story could be nothing but a spy of the United States Internal Revenue Service; and, true to piratical tradition, sentenced me to be marooned on a desert isle. That very night the foul deed was done: the next sun rose to shine upon an outcast from humankind squatting forlornly on the beach of a desolate cay, God only knew where, and trying to recall his Robinson Crusoe . . .

"I had a thin time of it for several days, my friend! I lived frugally on the fruits of the land, when and if found, and such creatures of the shallow sea as I was able to snare with naked hands. The fruits were not sustaining, and the raw seafood made me wretchedly sick.

"The cay was one of an endless chain—little islets, some nothing more than rocks, some mere sandbanks dry only at low tide, separated by narrow channels of no great depth. I made my laborious way from one to another; but when at length I did stumble across a settlement it was only a huddle of wattled huts inhabited by negro sponge-fishers, their wives and progeny, who spoke a patois unintelligible to my ears, lived in squalour indescribable, and discovered boundless contempt for a white man in such plight. For all that, they gave me cooked food of a kind into which I did not care to enquire too closely, being contented enough to have it stay on my stomach.

"Their headman had enough English to strike a bargain with me. . . . I had fled in my shirt and trousers, the only valuable I possessed was a wrist-watch in a gold case. Sea-water had put it out of service, but the negro coveted it with great lust, and agreed in exchange for it to convey me in his boat to another island on which there were white men. Thus it fell out that, some ten days after my dive into the harbour of Nassau, I found myself on a cay of good size which served one particular band of rum-runners as a secret rendezvous and dépôt.

"My condition at that juncture was so pitiable as to make my tale seem credible; I posed as a French sailor who had been washed overboard from a passing vessel during a blow that had recently swept the islands. The rum-runners were a rough lot, but humane: they took me in, fed and clothed me, would have let me kill myself with drink had I been so minded, and raised no objection when I prayed for a chance to work my passage on the first vessel that put in to take on a cargo for the States. Having eaten their bread and salt, I shall not betray their confidence: it is enough that I was set ashore not too far from this city. And here I am."

Lanyard saluted the detective with his glass; and in an explosive grunt Crane proclaimed that he would be everlastingly damned. "You went through all that hell to come back here and stick your fool head into the noose that's waiting for it!"

"My dear friend: I didn't like to dash your expectations . . ."

"Don't you realize what you're up against?—wanted for a dozen jobs pulled off in the last six months! a price of fifty thousand cold-drawn dollars on your head!"

"But, by all accounts, the Lone Wolf was drowned to death in the middle of Northeast Providence Channel on the night of the fifth of June."

"Don't suppose anybody takes any stock in that yarn today, do you?"

The stress on the adverb caused Lanyard's eyes to widen. "And why not?"

"See here!" Crane bounced up in his bed and with every evidence of strong emotion levelled a bony forefinger; but second thought closed the lips that stormy indignation had opened, bewilderment blanked out the fire that had flamed up in his eyes, frustration slackened his arm; in mild despair he fell back upon his pillow. "I don't get you," he uttered feebly—"that's all: I just don't get you."

"But, my dear sir, it is now and ever will be my ambition to make sure that you, in your official capacity, never do get me."

But the detective wasn't in a humour to be patient with persiflage. "I don't get you," he mulishly reiterated. "If you're aiming to give me some sort of a steer, I don't connect with the big idea, when your one best bet—and *I know you're* wise enough to know it—is to keep all the scenery you can between you and me all the time, and not come stalling around in fancy dress to give me an earful that don't matter a whoop if it ain't true. Because, I tell you this, Lanyard! . . ."

Crane was again sitting up and brandishing an admonitory forefinger. "Let me tell you this here and now, for your own good: As long as I believed in you, there wasn't much you could name I wouldn't have done for you; but the way things look now, unless you're prepared to come through with something more nourishing to my confidence than drawing-room manners and a baby stare, you're monkeying with high explosive this very minute; because just as soon as ever you leave this flat and I'm no longer bound by my promise not to mix things up with you"—a move of a disgusted hand designated the pistol whose return had put the detective on his honour—"I'm going to light out after you and camp on your trail night and day till I get you right—so help me!"

"Amen!" Lanyard piously chanted. "No: don't be angry, but believe I mean that in all seriousness. Had I not expected to find such fidelity to principle in you, that even friendship cannot corrupt, I should have held to my ancient rule and played a lone hand in this game of Blind Wolf's Buff: I am here tonight for a single purpose: to ask your aid and offer you mine in the business of bringing the Lone Wolf to book, whether he prove to be myself or some impostor trading on my old-time reputation."

"So that's the song and dance, eh?"

Lanyard shrugged. "I must not resent your tone, matters being as they have been made to seem. But I shall persuade you of my sincerity before I bid you good night, and more, that grounds exist for reasonable doubt concerning my guilt of the crimes imputed

to me; or . . . I will surrender to you forthwith and let the law take its course."

In a hard stare Crane wondered aloud: "You mean that, Lanyard?" But a smile was all his answer; and after another little pause the detective silently extended a hand which Lanyard leaned forward to grasp. "Now lay 'em on the table, face up."

"I have every confidence in your charity," Lanyard responded, sitting back; "but what I shall tell you now will test it. On the night of the third of November last—"

"That night after you pulled that turn with Mallison at little Mrs. McFee's?"

"Precisely—"

"Night of the day you disappeared!"

"'Disappeared'?"

"Nobody I know has seen hair nor hide of you since."

"That's most interesting," Lanyard commented, making mental memoranda. "You know nothing, then, of a motor accident on the Armonk Road in which I was involved on the night in question?"

"First I've heard of it."

"There was such an accident, notwithstanding, in which I sustained grave injuries; I bear a new scar upon my head, beneath the hair, that satisfies me at least one hurt was grave."

"Well!" Crane laughed shortly—"guess you ought to know if anybody."

"That's the very point: I ought to—but I don't."

"Mean to say you don't remember—?"

"Between the moment when I was struck and thrown by a motor-car that night of November, and the moment when, on the morning of the fifth of June, I bumped my head badly, falling from a companion-ladder on the Port Royal, I remember nothing. For all I know of my life between these dates, I am indebted to a lady who may or may not be a sacred vessel of the unbiased truth—Mademoiselle Delorme."

"Liane Delorme!" cried Crane—"where in time did you meet up with that war-horse?"

"On board the Port Royal."

"Funny! that dame sailed for France last February—by request—and specially requested not to come back, too."

"You are sure?"

"Made it my business to see her off. The Lone Wolf had just begun to be a regular pest, about that time, and I thought maybe little Liane knew more than she was willing to let on. So we got the Government to put on the screws; it amounted to her being deported, though she was given to understand the Government's memory might go bad if her's got good. But she left swearing in seven languages, none of 'em ladylike, she didn't know the first thing about you and was a cruelly misjudged woman and all like that."

"Yet she must have returned, to have sailed on the Port Royal with me."

"Oh! there are a hundred different ways, all good, for an undesirable alien to sneak into this country—by rail from Canada or Mexico, or through any port but New York—running next to no risk of being spotted and held up except by accident."

"You interest me more every minute. Pray bear in mind I have seen no newspapers, while you, I daresay, have read more than one report of my disappearance from the Port Royal . . . No doubt, then, you can tell me who claimed the honour of having recovered the necklace."

"What necklace?"

"The one I am credited with having stolen from the wife of your worthy Chief of Police."

"Guess you mean Commissioner of Police—Commissioner Enright." Frankly mistrustful examination of Lanyard's face ended in the generous verdict: "Somebody's been kidding you, son."

"I will not dispute that—I begin to be distressed to discriminate the statements of fact which have recently been made me from what would seem to have been the fictions of a lively fancy. I have, for example, on the one hand, your word, as I understand it, that the good wife of Commissioner Enright did not, shortly prior to the sailing of the Port Royal, suffer the loss by theft of a valuable diamond necklace."

"Nor at any other time. Or if she did—and if he's got a wife—the Commish kept it darned quiet."

"On the other hand, I am suspected of having done much business in the Lone Wolf's well-known line—"

"Sure are."

"During a period which began, I take it, about the first of the year—"

"Some time before Christmas."

"And ended with my late but well-timed decease."

"Thought I told you nobody in this burg takes any stock in that fairy tale."

"But you didn't answer my question: Why not?"

"Because all New York knows, if the Lone Wolf was drowned last June, his ghost goes prowling on."

"What are you telling me?"

"Just what you hear: When the news leaked out that you'd croaked in the Bahamas, everybody who had anything worth stealing drew a long breath and turned over to get a few winks of badly needed sleep. Right there was the wide open chance your ghost couldn't overlook without losing face in the spirit underworld. And didn't: no ghost ever walked that shook a livelier hoof. If it's any satisfaction to you, its latest manifestations have converted the entire Police Department of the City of New York into a posse of wild-eyed spiritualists."

"And you, my friend?"

Crane twinkled like a roguish wooden Indian. "Who, me? I ain't all converted yet. An hour ago I was wabbly, but now I see you sitting before me as large as life and twice as unnatural, I'm just on the fence. One thing I'm sure of: You ain't noticeably demised. But that isn't saying you're not responsible for the performances that have been given in your name, these last few weeks."

"While I was sustaining life on shellfish in the Bahamas?"

"That's your story. I don't say it isn't gospel: but you've got to admit you'd have told it, or something like it, if you had been in Town here all the time."

Not only that, but how do I know you aren't what they call psychic—a medium—able to swing a mean ectoplasm?"

"But—bear with me, my friend, remembering that this to me is the gravest of questions—admit that any one capable of trading on my posthumous reputation must have been equally capable of impersonating me while I was still presumed to be alive."

"That's reasonable . . ."

Lanyard had a thoughtful moment. "Do me another favour," he resumed—"allow me to use your good offices to make another test of my information. Take that telephone on the table by your elbow, call the Hotel Walpole, ask for Madame de Montalais. If she is no longer stopping there, find out, if you can, when she left, and whether the management knows her present address."

"Madame de Montalais . . ." Crane took the telephone instrument to his bosom and called for the Walpole, but while he waited for the connection made no secret of the spirit of inquisitiveness in which he was mulling over that strange new name. "If it's a fair question—"

"The lady with whom I dined at the Inn of the Green Woods, an hour before my misfortune on the Armonk Road."

Before Crane could comment, the Walpole answered; and after some delay the hotel detective, none too well pleased to be waked up at three in the morning but obligingly bestirring himself on behalf of a colleague, reported that Madame de Montalais

had "checked out" to sail for France on the ninth of March, leaving the forwarding address of Château de Montalais, near the town of Nant, in the Department of the Lozère.

Lanyard nodded doleful acknowledgement of this facer to hopes cruelly reanimated by the discovery that Liane Delorme had, in the course of their conference on board the Port Royal, and for reasons of her own that remained illegible, been guilty of more than one lache in respect of the truth. "That avenue is closed, then. I feared it would be. But give me a moment now to put my thoughts in order . . ."

More to cover his disconsolation than for the reason alleged, he bent forward with an elbow on a knee and a hand shading his eyes. "You tell me," he presently pursued, "no one you know has seen me in the flesh since we met at Folly McFee's . . ."

"Any number of reputable citizens have caught glimpses of you," Crane corrected—"and very much in the flesh, very busy raising particular hell with their property rights."

"But nobody in fact who knew me personally, who could swear to my identity with the man who passed for me?"

"Nobody. Just the same, the descriptions they turned in were middling good portraits of the Lone Wolf in action. More than that, there's that flash-light photo—"

"I was coming to that: Liane mentioned it, and I have wondered . . . It was secured, I believe, when the Lone Wolf descended upon the family fold of the Stuyvesant Ashes?"

"It was so."

"Have you a copy at hand, by any chance?"

Crane grunted testily, drew a rusty leather wallet from under his pillow, and from the papers with which it was stout sorted out an unmounted photographic print of post-card size. "Gaze on that," he recommended in grim humour, "and see if maybe it don't put a kick in the poor dear memory."

Lanyard hitched his chair nearer the light and with eyes bent over the print. But his first glance caused his heart to fail him: idle to challenge the fidelity of that likeness, as well deny the lineaments that looked out from one's shaving mirror every morning . . .

The man whom the flashlight had surprised was kneeling with one ear to a safe built in flush with a wall, his face turned squarely to the camera as he eavesdropped upon the hidden tumblers clicking and thumping in response to manipulation of the combination-dial by his slender, clever fingers. The latter were neatly gloved in white kid, for the man wore formal evening clothes beneath an inverness cloak of good theatrical effect. The hand that wasn't busy with the dial held an electric torch whose beam, of course, had been too weak to register in the intense glare of the flashlight explosion. On the rug between his knee and the wall lay an open leather case stocked with what appeared to be a compact kit of burglar's tools.

"Well!" Crane urged, not without a shade of professional malice, when Lanyard's silent contemplation of the photograph threatened to know no end: "how about it?"

Lanyard straightened up and cheerfully smiled. "Pretty thing," he said—"jolly well done . . . If you can find yourself another, I'd be grateful for the gift of this."

"You're much obliged. I can lay my hands on a gross or two any time I want. The Police Department struck 'em off by the thousand."

"Pity!" Lanyard deplored: "such a curiosity really ought to be a rarity. Thus does commercial photographing ring the death-knell of Art."

"But joking aside—" Crane began with some asperity.

"You ask too much," Lanyard interrupted. "Do you honestly expect me to gaze on this and keep a straight face?"

"If you want my opinion, I'll say it's no laughing matter for you."

"But do you tell me that as one who has given this photograph close and intelligent study?"

"What's the matter with it? Don't you think it does your fatal beauty justice?"

"But more: I am overcome by the appreciation which this drives home of the dashing figure I cut of old in the popular eye. Prior to this, I have always imagined that the public took the gentleman cracksmen with a grain of salt—holding his attitudinizing in romantic evening dress properly peculiar to his appearances on the stage and the cinema screen. And you, my dear Crane! a man of your wide acquaintance with the ways of crooks taking this blatant bit of imposition seriously—!"

Crane's mouth tightened, his brows combatively beetled. "There are crooks and crooks. I never thought so badly of you as to suppose you worked like the rank and file."

"But like this!" Lanyard gave the print a derisive flick of fingernails. "Take my word for it, I was never such an ass."

"Never did a job in a full dress suit?"

"Never to my knowledge did I costume myself like a man in a play when deliberately setting out to open a safe. Furthermore"—Lanyard wrinkled a nose of scorn over the photograph—"never in my life have I been caught wearing a soft-bosomed shirt with a tail coat: an antic one cheerfully resigns to dancing men. By-the-bye: whatever did become of Mallison?"

"Jumped his bail," the detective growled—"along with the others you rounded up for me that night at Mrs. McFee's."

"And you have never been able to find him?"

"Not a chance."

There was bitterness in that to win a quick, keen look from Lanyard; but Crane added nothing more than a grin half-sheepish, half-sullen.

"He must be shrewder than I thought, that one."

"I don't know . . . he's got brains enough to lay low and stand in with Morphew, that's all."

"And the devil takes care of his own."

"You got the idea exactly."

"But tell me, why does this great city of yours tolerate its Morphews?"

"What's it going to do? You can't pin anything

on a guy like Morphey; he always keeps well inside the law, never turns a trick with his own hand; and pulls too strong an oar politically not to be able to look after the people he hires to do his dirty work. Stands to reason, he's got to; he can't afford to risk somebody's turning State's evidence for lack of protection."

"But surely a man of his type must have enemies in high places as well as friends—"

"Maybe so; but they're not in the saddle just now; we'll have to be patient and wait for New York to pull another of its periodical spasms of civic virtue before an ordinary dick like me can go out after the likes of Morphey without hearing a still small voice whispering at his shoulder, if he cares anything about his job he'd better lay off. Remember that time we raided the Clique Club? That had a follow-up that still sticks in my crop . . ."

"But if Morphey were actually caught, as you say, with the goods on—"

"That's different: prove anything on that bird and outraged public sentiment will do the rest."

"Do you happen to know where he lives?"

Crane recited the address in sulky abstraction from which he emerged abruptly with a gleam of alarm. "Look here! don't tell me you're simp enough to dream of starting anything with Morphey—"

"My dear friend: I never was, it was Morphey took the offensive with me, unprovoked—"

"And you're a glutton for punishment, eh?"

"Do you take me for one to endure such malice

without striking a blow for self-respect? What way I shall take with the animal I am as yet undecided, I count on events to show it to me; and now I count on something more — your passive countenance, at least."

"Oh, don't worry! I won't ever come between you two; and if I ever see a chance to land on Morpew when he isn't looking, because he's too busy keeping his guard up against you—you can bet your life I'll do it. All the same, if you'll take a fool's advice, you'll quit right now, admit you're licked and let it go at that."

"It may be your advice is wiser than you think," Lanyard conceded.

"Well: I'm not going to lose any sleep on your account. Morpew's out of Town, nobody seems to know just where . . ."

"Like Mallison, eh?"

"Why keep fretting about Mallison? He's out."

"Perhaps . . ."

"What do you mean, 'perhaps'?"

"Jumping one's bail is not precisely proof of a clear conscience; that act of the dancing yegg's ought to be enough for you—no matter what your mind may be with respect to my guilt or innocence."

"Don't get your point."

"It's rather an obvious point in the sight of one who knows what I know—that Mallison claimed to be on intimately friendly terms with the Stuyvesant Ashes, with Mrs. Ashe, at least; Mary, I remember he called the lady, in mentioning her to Folly McFee."

"Well?"

"Is it not at least a curious circumstance that this print, this so well posed and composed likeness of the Lone Wolf wearing his working clothes for the night shift, should have been snapped in the home of people reputed to be on friendly terms with Mallison?"

"That only goes to show how little you know New York Society, if you've got any idea the Ashes—one of the oldest and best families in Town—would lend themselves to any frame-up engineered by a cheap little crook like that egg."

"One infers that no Ashe has ever been known to be guilty of a mis-step—"

"I don't say that. The men of that family have always stepped out pretty lively—"

"But isn't it possible Mallison may have known something which the present Stuyvesant Ashe preferred to keep secret from the general public? You're surely not forgetting blackmail was one of Mallison's ways of earning a dishonest living."

"Meaning you believe Mallison blackmailed Stuyvesant Ashe and his wife into letting him snap a phoney photograph of some one made up to look like you, trying to open their safe?"

"Really, you read my mind."

"Well!" Crane snorted his contempt—"that bright little theory blows up like a toy balloon somebody pokes a hot cigarette into—because the bird you see in front of that safe got away with every little thing it held. I guess you won't go so far as to tell me the Stuyvesant Ashes would fall for blackmail to that extent."

"I tell you nothing, because I know nothing—I do but recommend the possibility to your thoughtful consideration. Conceding the thanklessness of trying to get the Stuyvesant Ashes to contradict the story they told, I can only point out its more glaring absurdities." Smilingly Lanyard put the print into the detective's hands. "Look closely, my good Crane! and tell me how you would describe the look of this alleged Lone Wolf."

"Looks sort of flabbergasted," Crane replied. "Who wouldn't with a flashlight going off all of a sudden under his nose when he's keyed up to G trying to pull off a big job?"

"But have you never observed that a man actually taken by surprise never shows it in a flashlight photograph? The flash comes and goes too quickly for such an one to put on an appropriate expression for the camera to catch. It is the man who is, as you put it, all keyed up in expectation of the flash who looks startled in the picture."

Crane took another look. "Something in that, maybe," he grudged.

"Consider then, these other anomalies: Not only am I represented as being idiot enough to go a-burgling in evening dress—"

"But you claim you didn't know what you were doing when all this happened."

"What I claim is, if it is fair to assume a rap on the head caused me to revert to foregone ways of knavery, it is only fair to assume further that I would have displayed at least a little reverence for the prin-

ciples of common sense that formerly guided my errant footsteps. The succès fou of the Lone Wolf in pre-War Paris did not result from the expenditure of a medium of mental effort. That one never touched burglar's tools, far less carried a kit of them, once he had served out his apprenticeship. If he could solve the secret of a safe by ear—as the fellow in this amusing picture would have us believe he can—why burden himself with tools which, if found upon him, would spell his damnation in the esteem of the police? Finally, we are asked to believe not only that the Lone Wolf neglected to search for burglar-alarm wiring on this occasion—and if he had taken that first precaution of all competent cracksmen he could hardly have overlooked the wire which led to the flashlight—but that after the flash had gone off in his face he proceeded methodically to open the safe, abstract what valuables it contained, and make good his escape!”

“Well!” Crane argued in the last ditch—“but we’ve always been told the Lone Wolf was a cool hand.”

Lanyard laughed aloud. “But I am in a position to assure you the coolth of that hand would have been nothing compared with the coldness of his feet, had anything like this ever happened to him; I have my low pride, my friend, and while I will never admit the Lone Wolf was a white-livered cur, I am free to confess that, in circumstances such as must have attended the taking of this photograph, he would have tucked tail between legs and ingloriously have run for cover without an instant of needless delay.”

“I don’t know,” Crane reluctantly conceded. “All

you say sounds reasonable enough, and I've got a mean feeling I was the world's prize dumbell not to think of your arguments before. But admitting all that—where does it get us?"

"To the point I promised to bring you to, where you are obliged to admit I may not have been the author of those recent robberies attributed to the Lone Wolf."

"And where do we go from there?"

"I can speak only for myself," said Lanyard, rising: "I go to find out the truth. I do not know what happened, where I lay hid, or what I did, in all those seven months. It may be this conviction that I feel, that I had no hand in the crimes imputed to me, is merely a mirage of vain hope cheating my good judgement. It is possible I shall find I myself am the man—even the posing popinjay one sees in this snapshot. In that event—one so subject to spells of criminal activity in phases of submerged consciousness is too dangerous to remain at large; I shall return and let you put me where I can do no more harm. But I don't believe you need hope to see me again on these terms; and if we should chance to meet before I succeed in satisfying myself—well! bear in mind, I ask no quarter. It is your duty to lay me by the heels if you can—and if you do, the fault will be mine, I'll have no right to complain. I have only one favour to ask of you, and that runs on all fours with your duty: don't let anxiety to bag Michael Lanyard make you forget that Mallison likewise is at liberty and may very well turn out to be the key to all this mystery."

Crane's face wrinkled into a radiating grin. "Funny

thing about all this is," he asserted, "I believe in you—I even believe you'll come in and take your medicine like a little man if you find you're the guilty party." He wrung Lanyard's hand with painful cordiality. "Go to it, old son: maybe I'm being kidded to a fare-ye-well, but I'm for you. You won't mind my not getting up to see you to the window?"

XVIII

CONFIDENT that their interview just ended had converted an active antagonist, the most dangerous he knew because the most intelligent and dispassionately devoted to his duty, into at worst a passive opponent disposed to let the benefit be his of any legitimate doubt and to adopt a policy of hands-off in as far as Lanyard's still nebulous plans might affect a common enemy; confident as well that the change in his appearance insured against casual identification by any other adversary, public or private: Lanyard on leaving Crane none the less went his way as warily as one who walked in living dread of being ambushed at every corner.

From the door of the building in which Crane lodged to the maw of an underground railway station was only a step, but a step which Lanyard took with all the furtive haste of a ghost belated at the hour of cockcrow. The last coin that lined his pockets passed him through a clattering turnstile to a bare platform from which, while waiting for one of the occasional trains of the post-midnight schedule, he watched both entrances with eyes quick in the cast shadow of a ragged hat-brim. But not another soul followed into the station, he was able to board a northbound train unvexed by any hint of espionage; though he reckoned this poor compensa-

tion for a sense of quandary only aggravated by advices which, dependable though he must hold them, coming as they had from Crane, had paradoxically proved more benighting than otherwise with the new light they shed upon his dark perplexities.

He knew no amazement in the discovery that Liane had lightly trifled with the truth in her version of his seven months of lost existence; but her capricious warping of certain facts and suppression of others only added one more mystery to that company whose faces of empty imbecility now mocked every waking effort to read their meaning and, when Lanyard slept, like nightmares drifted through his dreams. Not that he found it hard to understand that she had woven her tissue of deception hoping thereby to fix a lien upon his gratitude. Either he had been her lover for a time, as she asserted, and she was bent on holding him by hook or crook, or he had not and she thought to win him by making him believe himself bound to her in honour; wherefore the inventions of the purloined necklace and the forced flight from New York that had been infeasible without her friendly offices, as well as of the sanctuary and aid that Liane claimed to have given Lanyard when he was hard pressed in his flagrant course as the Lone Wolf redivivus.

In this last allegation there might be, no doubt there was, some half-truth latent: Lanyard was not yet prepared to deny that the Lone Wolf had lately prowled again in his own flesh if in his mental dissociation; but the conflict of testimony that proved the distortion to Liane's purposes of half the truth at least made it

competent to him to question whether her story had had any foundation in the truth whatever. Certain it was—Crane's word for this—that Lanyard's long absence from the city had failed to put a period to that sequence of thievish feats which New York credited to the Lone Wolf's cunning. And, as Lanyard had insisted, there was nothing to show that the author of these more recent exploits had not been the author likewise of the series which had predated his flight. Nothing forbade his hugging that contention to his heart and getting what comfort he could of it.

As a matter of fact, he got precious little: nothing seemed of any real moment, just then, measured by the riddle of Eve's return to France as the report of the Hotel Walpole posed it; a statement which circumstantially refuted Liane's account of that event, which happened unhappily to be the only explanation Lanyard could accept without reluctance. By the implications inherent in Liane's version, the lovers had parted prior to the beginning of that bad new chapter in the history of the Lone Wolf, had parted in tenderness and sadly, because of Lanyard's set refusal to let Eve link her life with that of a reclaimed criminal. And with all his heart Lanyard wanted to believe it had been so. . . . But Crane asserted that the Lone Wolf had been active in New York before Christmas, and that Liane had been deported during the month of February, while the Hotel Walpole fixed the date of Eve's departure on the ninth of March! Liane, then, could have had no personal acquaintance with the reasons which had impelled Eve to leave America. But

could they have been anything else than heartbreak resulting from failure to reanimate the spirit of the man she loved in the being of the Lone Wolf?

Would he ever know? Never, he told himself, from the lips of Eve. Inconceivable that she should ever again consent to see him, believing what she must believe, or even to read his letters—assuming that he could find the effrontery so to importune her. Nothing short of full exoneration could revive her faith in him; and even given that, Lanyard would hardly find it in his heart to blame her did she shrink from meeting him, being seen with him, letting her name be coupled in the public mouth with the name of one who had been singled out by the spotlight of a notoriety so shameful.

No: he must count Eve lost to him for all time and soothe that wound, if he could, with the assurance that it was better so.

But before he could become reconciled to that renunciation he must possess the truth in his own knowledge, the truth whole and unvarnished.

So now he was striking directly at the heart of darkness in which, he was satisfied, the truth lay perdu.

Ten minutes from Crane's door he came up for air from the Plaza station of the Subway, slipped into Central Park like a snake into a thicket, and was lost to human sight for more than half an hour thereafter. Then the lights of Central Park West picked him up at Seventy-seventh street; and striking diagonally across the grounds of the Museum of Natural History he threaded quiet residential streets to Riverside Drive, upon which he turned north, moving with the carefree

slouch of the vagabond he so picturesquely seemed to be. A policeman on patrol, nobody else, gave him a second glance in passing, saw that he was sober, dismissed him as a figure of no potential consequence for either good or ill.

The night, seasonably intemperate, might have been compounded according to his own prescription, so excellently suited it was to his purpose. Its heat had made the parks populous with refugees from sweltering apartments; at this late hour they lingered still upon the walks, the lawns and benches in sufficient numbers to render Lanyard's restless presence equally inconspicuous with uncounted others. A tenuous haze dimmed the lustre of the sluggish flood of ink that was the Hudson River and turned distant lights into pulsing points of iridescence. The driveway proper droned wearily with its steady if diminished flow of motor traffic.

Morphew's town-house stood apart from less pretentious neighbors, a four-square lump of unlovely masonry squatting, with a singular effect of family likeness to its owner, in grounds more ample than even opulence is wont to run to for its city *pieds-à-terre*. Open windows and unboarded doors showed it had not been shut up for the Summer, though Morpheu were, as Crane had intimated, sojourning somewhere out of Town. And the lack of illumination other than a soft night-light behind the iron grille and plate-glass of its great front doors seemed to advertise a household sensibly abed. The sharp eyes beneath the brim of that disreputable hat had marked down half a dozen

avenues of easy if unconventional entrance before Lanyard, with his idlest air, turned off from the main promenade that runs with the driveway and found a soft spot on a lawn where a clump of shrubbery, standing between him and the nearest street lamps, threw a shadow black as jet.

Here, in a lazy sprawl, he rested for upwards of an hour, covert attention constant to the mansion across the Drive. In that time it gave no evidence of wakeful occupation; but as break of dawn drew near the population of the park dispersed and the tide of wheeled traffic became an intermittent trickle, lessening the risk of observation that he must chance when the time came to put his purpose into effect. In this last he went ahead unhindered by any scruple, holding Morphew solely answerable, as he did, for all the tribulations that had been visited upon him since that long ago night of their first acquaintance. Eight months of enforced submission to the wear and tear of Morphew's malevolence had brought him to the pass in which tonight found him, penniless, homeless, hungry, a hunted thing without a friend to turn to. It devolved upon Morphew, consequently, to bow to the inexorable workings of the law of compensation and stand to Lanyard now in the place of friend, willy-nilly to furnish him food and drink, shelter and change of raiment, set his mind at rest upon the matters that most distressed it, and finally put money in his pockets. Morphew could afford all that and never miss its cost to him out of the profits he must have piled up as impresario for the Lone Wolf's farewell tour.

The irony of that conceit was pleasing: Lanyard wore a grim smile beneath his beard as he addressed him to his burglarious business.

The point of attack he had settled on was a window with a balcony in the second storey, on the south side of the house, the farthest removed from the more exposed face which fronted on the Drive. The mouth of the tradesmen's entrance, an alley closed by a gate of iron work, made it possible to attempt the ascent in comparative darkness, and horizontal channels between the huge blocks of hewn stone furnished helpful foot and hand-holds. Only the rawest new beginner in the sodality of second-storey workers could have made any difficulty about that climb: Lanyard negotiated it with the ease of a lizard—two minutes after his subtle shadow had faded from the cross-town street into the tradesmen's entrance he had gained the level of the balcony and, plastered against those cool cheeks of stone, was inching round the corner. At the end of another minute he silently but rapidly wriggled in over the balcony rail and dropped flat to its floor, there to wait without stir, for so long that he might have been suddenly petrified by appreciation of his own temerity, till senses tuned up to the utmost of their fine efficiency assured him he had not been seen from the street or from any window looking out upon it, and that the room beyond the window at his side was as still as death; the circumstance that it was a French window with both wings folded back into its recess rendering it not necessarily idiotic to trust to his super-acute hearing.

On the inside of the recess hung open draperies of heavy stuff. Between them no light showed. Lanyard surmised a living-room beyond, a study or a dining-room: the bedchambers would be on the floor above. One quick crouching stride passed him in between the hangings, another, in the course of which he stood up, took him to the middle of the room, where he stopped short, poised tensely upon the balls of his feet, like a jungle creature scenting human flesh in the wind—galvanized by the whiff of rich cigar smoke that told him he had walked into a trap. Simultaneously the wings of the window banged to behind him, its latch rattled, curtain-rings clashed upon a tube of brass, the bleached blue oblong of the glass was blacked out, and he stood encompassed by night absolute—only the ember at the end of a cigar blinked at him from a little distance, glowing and fading by turns like an eye of basilisk spite.

With escape by the way he had entered surely blocked, and standing on unknown ground, without one clue to the location of any other exit, he had no choice but to wait for light before adventuring another step. But seconds dragged like minutes and still the darkness held unbroken: they were playing with him, giving uncertainty time to sap his nerve. In exasperation, but schooling his voice to a sulky key, he said: "Well! you've got me. Make a light."

No one answered, no light was made . . .

In a grimmer tone he spoke again: "I'll give you a count of three in which to make a light. If you don't, I'll drill a bullet through whatever happens to be twelve inches below that cigar."

The eye of fire burned a more sardonic crimson; that was all.

In sheer bravado he began to count: "One—two—"

A whistle lanced the stillness, he was sensitive to a sudden stir at his back and swung about, striking out at random and without effect; a savage blow, likewise launched at random, fell notwithstanding squarely upon his cheek, just forward of the ear; staggered, he reeled sideways and blundered into a brace of ready arms. Before he could recover and set himself to break that hold other arms found and wrapped his body round from behind, a deft foot kicked his heels from under him, and, fighting like a maniac, Lanyard took the floor with a crash that made its timbers groan, beneath a writhing mass of humanity whose weight alone was enough to crush him into breathless quiescence.

Overhead a prism chandelier blazed out like a sunburst . . .

Pinned down by no less than five huskies, one to each arm and leg and one, inevitably the stoutest, digging hard knees into his chest, Lanyard turned his head to one side to give his eyes respite from than blinding glare above, and lay looking directly into the apathetic mask of Morpew.

XIX

MORPHEW was holding down a huge easy-chair without any appearance of ease: feet well apart and planted solidly, huge and bedizened paws firmly clasping each an arm of the chair as if to forestall its wickedly slipping out from under him. His face of a pale beast, with its unwinking light eyes under leaden hoods, its gash of a mouth, its flaccid jowls and wattles, was void of any readable expression; but for seepage of smoke from its nostrils and the corner of the mouth that wasn't filled by the cigar it might have passed for a devil-mask modelled by hands of decadence.

Above and somewhat behind this unholy vision, Mr. Peter Pagan, resting folded arms on the back of the chair, presented the face of a subsenile imp in familiar attendance, innocent, however, of his master's affection for the pose imperturbable—his clown's lips wide with a gleeful grin, beady eyes alive with malice.

"I suppose," he said, as one might to a troublesome child, "you think you're smart, keeping decent, law-abiding folk up like this, till all hours!"

Lanyard reflected on this pleasantry with a weary droop of eyelids, otherwise held still and dumb.

With dramatic deliberation Morpheu relaxed the hold of one hand on the chair long enough to extract the cigar from between his teeth. All in a grunt he commanded: "Frisk him."

Trained fingers turned out the pockets of the captive. "This guy's got no gat," the man on his chest reported in plaintive disappointment.

"Never thought he had," Pagan acidly commented: "Bluff is the middle name of our fair-haired lad."

"Let him up," Morphew ordered—"but stand by in case he still feels hostile."

A free man once more, Lanyard scrambled to his feet, shook himself like a dog, gave his seagoing slacks a practised hitch, the sleeves and skirts of his makeshift coat a scrupulous dusting, and smiled sunny reassurance first on the watchful circle round him (noting impenitently that one man was nursing a swollen nose while another was uttering a few loosened teeth) then, with an impudent colour of indulgence added, beamed upon the seated arbiter of the scene.

"Monsieur is needlessly alarmed," he said with an urbanity unaffected by hastened breathing. "Something tells me I were well-advised to put off our overdue accounting against a more favourable occasion."

"All the accounting that's going to be done," Morphew heavily countered, "is going to happen right here and now, before either you or me leave this room." He shifted a passionless glare to his henchmen. "Clear out and wait in the hall: I'll give a whistle if I want you again. If I give two whistles, one of you call a cop—the rest come running."

Lanyard indecorously yawned, then gave an open laugh as the battered bodyguard withdrew. Uninvited, he helped himself to an overstuffed lounge chair, and sighed in grateful relaxation.

"A policeman, my good Morpew! do my ears mislead me?"

"No," Morpew definitely replied, "they don't."

Pagan cocked a critical eye at the ears in question. "Even foreshortened," he volunteered, "they don't look like ears to mislead anybody else."

But Pagan could wait, Lanyard couldn't afford to let an antic second distract any of the attention due his principal.

"I am to understand," he persisted, addressing Morpew, "it is your intention to give me in charge?"

"That rests with you."

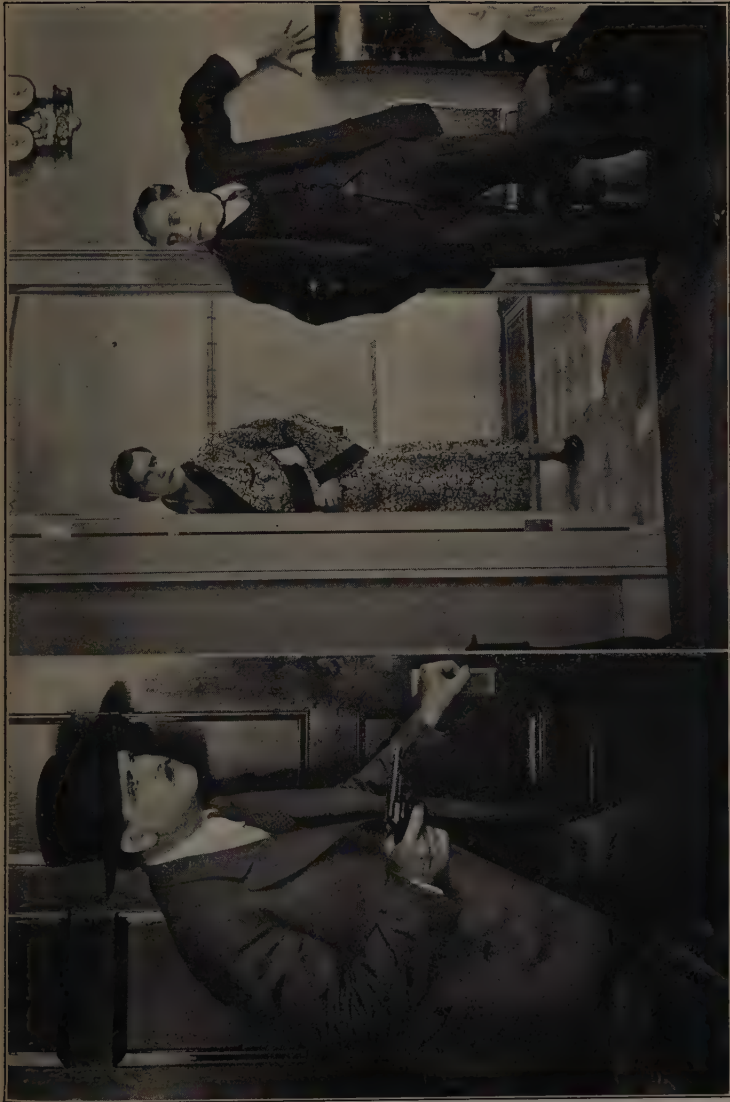
"Monsieur undoubtedly is pleased to be humorous . . ."

"Maybe, so, maybe not." Fixing Lanyard with an unintelligible stare, Morpew thoughtfully champed his cigar. "There's a lot of popularity lying around loose in this town, waiting to be pinned onto the hero that puts the Lone Wolf behind bars. And you ought to know whether you've had enough."

"But if you ask me," Lanyard frankly laughed—"too much!"

"All right," Morpew agreed in gloomy gratification: "That puts it up to you which you want to do now—go up the River to do a nice long stretch or stick on in Town here and take life easy."

"Not so long ago it was the Lone Wolf's boast that he never found it necessary to take life easily or otherwise . . . as you were good enough to remind me, monsieur, the last time we had the pleasure of conversing together."



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The Lone Wolf Returns
ADMIRE THE FASCINATING CROOK, MICHAEL LANYARD.

"Not the last time by a long sight," Morphew bluntly contradicted; "but I know when you mean."

"Today one begins to wonder if that boast was good only because the Lone Wolf had never been given proper provocation."

Morphew took time to digest this. "You talk as crooked as you work," he concluded; "but the way I take it, that's a threat."

"It is altogether as you care to take it."

"If you don't like the way you've been handled, you've only got yourself to blame. I've given you every chance to come through like a gentleman—"

"But constituted yourself judge of whether I did or not."

The wooden set of Morphew's features became, if possible, more than ever marked, the puffed lids curtained more jealously those repellent eyes, his ruminative way with the cigar knew a momentary break.

With a vaguely innocent smile Lanyard snuggled down into luxurious upholstery and utilized the wait to look the room over with intelligent interest in the taste which had ruled its composition. A surprisingly handsome library, decorated and furnished with a dignity in no degree oppressive: all at wide odds with an environment such as one might have expected that bejewelled block of flesh to create for itself.

But the ominous pause was beginning to irk Pagan's nerves. He moved restlessly from his station at Morphew's back and laid hands upon a decanter which, with glasses and a siphon bottle, occupied a tray on one end of the library table.

"How about a little snifter, what?" he suggested with a leer overshoulder.

"Thank you," Lanyard returned politely—"but one recalls too well your black art as a bar-tender, monsieur; one hesitates to risk another waking up to find oneself accused of—it might well be—murder."

As if involuntarily, but without moving a superficial muscle, Morpew permitted a meditative rumble to escape him: "Murder . . ." And in a startled movement not wholly affected Lanyard sat up.

"Pardon, monsieur! one ought to keep a better guard upon one's tongue lest one put ideas into your head."

"Oh I say now! cut it out, can't you?" Pagan hastily remonstrated. "Why not be a sport, call that little skirmish of ours the fortunes of war, and let it go at that? No end of water has flowed down the Hudson since that night when you cut up so nasty—about nothing at all, practically—Morph here had to give you a taste of the whip. Not that he wanted to, but you asked for it, Lanyard—and you know you did!"

"But truly, monsieur, this grows fatiguing . . ."

"Everything's so different tonight," Pagan brightly argued. "We've all been through so much, we know one another heaps better—there isn't any sense at all in our keeping on at loggerheads."

"There is not?"

"Why! if the last half year has proved anything it's that we're all travelling one road, aiming at the same mark . . . Or shall we say marks, so long as the dear American people ain't listening in? . . . And

now we've all made our mistakes and are ready to admit and profit by them—you're going to cut out all this running round in circles and frothing at the mouth, going to come in and lie down under the table and be a good dog."

"I am?"

"Sure thing. Ask Morph: he knows. And you will, too, before long, if you don't now. And then we'll all be just like this"—Pagan illustrated by lacing his fingers—"just girls together, you know, all out for a good time. So why not begin the peace conference with just one friendly little hooter? It'll do us both good: you've had a hard day of it, and you've given us a hard night."

"It desolates me, monsieur, to think I have been, however unwittingly, the agent of your martyrdom to insomnia."

"Well: what *did* you think?" Giving up the ungrateful work of trying to seduce Lanyard into tippling, Pagan philosophically mixed himself a lonely solace. "Didn't suppose we'd be able to sleep a wink, did you, when you'd got us all excited up?"

"I! but how?"

"Pulling off this pussyfoot return of the prodigal."

"It is true," Lanyard thoughtfully considered: "by what appears, you did know of my return."

"If we hadn't, there wouldn't have been any sense in our staging this swell reception in your honour."

"I presume it seems stupid of me to be surprised—"

"Dear man!" Pagan benignly advised him—"we brought you back."

"I am afraid I am incurably stupid . . ."

"It was one of my boats you came north on from Rum Cay," Morpew brusquely explained. "If I hadn't given the boys down there the word by wireless, when they reported you'd turned up, you'd be there still, high and dry on the beach."

"Stupid," Lanyard insisted, "is too weak a term for my imbecility. And I never guessed—!"

"Never struck you it was funny," Morpew enquired in ponderous contempt, "a bootlegging outfit would let a total stranger get the low-down on the way the game was worked, and then give him free transportation North and turn him loose to tell all he knew to the enforcement gang?"

"One must confess one thought those fine fellows strangely trustful."

"You likely charged it all up to your winning little ways," Pagan sweetly observed over the rim of his tumbler. "Not that I want to rub it in . . ."

"But do go on. It is really a consolation to hear your wit improvise so brilliantly upon the theme of my infirmity—when I myself am at a loss for words."

"Like hell you are!" Pagan complained with an anguished grimace—"not so's anybody'd notice it."

"But still I find myself so feeble-minded," Lanyard confessed, "nothing yet gives me to understand why—"

Pagan started vivaciously to pursue the advantage which Lanyard conceded; but a baleful glance from Morpew reined his tongue in time, and drove him to bury a snubbed nose silently in strong drink.

"It's like this," Morpew began with consequence,

but paused to clear his throat when Lanyard turned on him a look of bright attention. "I'm a hard guy to cross," he stated with the simplicity of a strong plain man—"a damned hard guy to cross, if you don't know it. What I make up my mind I want, I get"—a pause lent the next word weight—"always. Maybe I have to wait a while sometimes, but in the end I always get what I go after. Always."

"Spoken like a one-hundred per-cent he-citizen, monsieur, of this land of bred-in-the-bone go-getters."

"All right," Morphew replied, mysteriously tolerant. "I don't mind your funny cracks at me, if they amuse you. That's your line, and I'll say your right bright at it, too. It isn't mine, and maybe that's my misfortune: a person can't have everything in this world, that's sure . . . But somehow I notice, no matter how many laughs I miss when they're being handed around—somehow I always manage to bag the last one. I've let you get away with a lot of rough stuff at my expense, Lanyard, but I'm not done with you yet. If you'd only lay off being a comedian long enough to think things over, it ought to teach you something and make it easier for us to understand each other."

"But continue, I beg you, monsieur," Lanyard replied with a specially straight face: "I am all attention, as you see."

Morphew darkly chewed his cigar for another moment . . . "I let my boys fetch you back to New York because I figured out maybe you'd had knocks enough to bring you round to a more docile frame of mind than you were in when you high-tailed it for

South America." A side alley of self-revelation proved too tempting: "That's the way I am, you see: when a man I want bucks on me, I make it a rule to give him all the rope he wants to wind himself up in good and tight before I start hauling in the slack. That night we first met, now . . . I made you a plain, open-and-shut business proposition, take it or leave it. If you hadn't r'ared back, showed your teeth and the whites of your eyes, and made such a fuss altogether about your lovely virtue, I and you wouldn't 've ever had any trouble. If there's one thing I despise worse than poison it's phony righteousness. And the way you carried on that night showed me plain enough kind treatment wasn't ever going to gentle you. So I laid off and let you perform. What happened?"

"Must we go into that? See: you're embarrassing Mr. Pagan here frightfully."

Morphew gave his head a shake, as one pestered by a buzzing insect. "What happened?" he obstinately iterated. "You went off and got loaded on a thimbleful of liquor, forgot all about being nature's nobleman, and pulled off one of the rawest jobs of second-storey stuff ever."

"But surely you are dealing unfairly now by the talents of that poor but willing creature Mallison."

"Mallison!"

A passion of indignation exploded in that snort, such as Morphew had never before betrayed capacity for feeling; and seeming to choke on a rush of words, he was temporarily unable to resume; while Lanyard, forbearing to question or comment, continued in a

wide stare of a sudden grown genuine. Unmistakably his mention of Mallison had touched a spot so sore that the iron rule of stolidity had been unseated. But for an instant only; quick to pull himself together, Morphew resumed his level drone of habit.

"Get that idea out of your head—if it's in it. Mally's a crooked little damn' fool if there ever was one, but he never in his best days had the guts to tackle big business."

"But, if memory serves, you were of another mind when we met at Mrs. McFee's—"

"You had me at a disadvantage—"

"How generous an admission!"

"It was your word against mine; and what chance did I have of proving you had everything all wrong, with the little McFee daft about you, ready to believe black was white if you told her so?"

"It isn't fair to confuse me with compliments. Pardon a slight digression: I am interested to know what became of Mallison."

"I don't know," Morphew admitted, louting. "But I will before long . . ."

He gave a minute to savage brooding. "If that boy had only had sense enough to trust me . . . But he got panicky for fear we'd fall down trying to alibi him, and blew without so much as good night."

"And you have not see him since?"

"Fat chance. He knows enough to steer clear of me after jumping the bail I put up for him."

"Still, one is hardly convinced that Mallison is the simple innocent you make him out to be."

"I suppose"—Morphew's manner was irritating by intention—"what you want me to believe is you don't remember owning up you done that job yourself."

"Ah!" Light from yet another angle promised now to illuminate the darker recesses of Liane's duplicity. "You have been talking with Mademoiselle Delorme—"

"With both of you."

"Pardon?"

"I'm telling you the three of us talked all that business over, I and you and Liane, half a dozen times if once, last Winter. You didn't make any bones then about admitting you'd turned that trick at Folly's while you were lit. What good do you think it's going to do you to stall about it now, try to feed the bull to me, the way you did to Liane on board that boat? Maybe she swallowed your yarn because she wanted to; but I'm no crazy woman, I'm not so dead struck on you I'll let you get away with telling me to my face you don't remember anything that went on in this Town before you went South. I'm wise, I know what you've got in mind; and that tale won't go down a little bit with yours truly."

"I see"

"Well," Morphew roughly insisted: "what do you see?"

"For one thing, that one was not mistaken in assuming you had recently talked with Mademoiselle Delorme."

"Why not? She hiked right back to Town as soon as you left her flat on the Port Royal."

"And promptly reported to you of course."

"Who do you think? What other friend did her and you have, with pull enough to keep the cops off your backs while you were running that continuous performance of yours last Winter?"

"Nevertheless, your influence failed to save Liane from deportation."

"She came back all right, she's here now, isn't she? Well then: who do you suppose fixed things up for her?"

"Pardon, monsieur: I do but marvel that power so autocratic should even once have failed a friend."

"Pretending you've forgotten all about how that happened, too, eh?" An uglier sneer overcast Morphew's countenance. "I suppose you don't remember anything about how you two got to feeling your oats, after you'd been Lone Wolfing a while and making a good thing out of it with my protection, and thought you could give me the air and never miss me—"

"No! not really?"

"I suppose you don't remember how I nudged the Government into deporting Liane to teach her discipline and then, when I found you didn't handle any better with her away, let her sneak back, gave you another chance, and when *that* didn't work made Town so hot for you both you had to take a running jump off the Battery . . . I suppose it's only natural you wouldn't remember little things like that."

"And very handsome it is of you to suppose so, and prove you do by itemizing in such minute detail all I pretend to have forgotten."

"That line of talk won't get you anywhere with me, Lanyard. Sarcastic cracks won't stop me checking up to show you where you get off trying to pull that lost memory stall on me. Why!" Morphew snorted in disgust—"you must think I'm easy."

"But no, monsieur! my memory is hardly so bad as all that."

"It's only on the blink when you want it to be, I guess."

"What it really needs now," Pagan put in with animation, "is for you to get yourself lammed over the bean again." He grasped the neck of the decanter suggestively. "I hate to do it, but for a friend . . . Just say the word, Lanyard, and I'll crown you King of Cracksmen."

"Shut up," Morphew brutally snapped.

With a little moan the sycophant applied himself anew to the soothing Scotch; and for a few moments no more was said, while Lanyard, sitting forward, bent a thoughtful frown to the rug at his feet, and Morphew studied his man with a subtle smile.

"Licked," he declared, at length: "that's what you are, Lanyard, licked to a standstill. Your nature started the job and I finished it. You'd ought to 've known better than to try to buck a combination like that."

"I'm sorry," Lanyard replied, looking up with an apologetic smile—"but if it isn't too much to ask you to be more plain-spoken . . ."

"All I mean is—there's no cure for a crook. If you were born crooked, you'll die a crook, no matter

how hard you struggle. It's your nature, and it's no use any man's trying to lick his nature: you're licked before you start. God knows I don't blame you for not wanting to believe that, on account of that dame you were stuck on—"

"By your leave, monsieur!" Lanyard sharply insisted—"we will not discuss that phase of my affairs."

"Just as you like. No offense intended, none, far's I'm concerned, taken." Morphew had suddenly shifted to an amazingly conciliatory line. "I bear you no ill will, Lanyard, in spite of all you've done to sprain my patience. Why! that battle you put up against your nature and me was a classic, and a man can't help but admire you for it, even if he did know all along you never had a chance. But now you know it, too, you're too sensible to keep on kicking against the pricks. Your motto from now on is 'Make the best of it'—and the best you can make of it, if you put your back into the business, is the life of Reilly for a man who knows how to live like you do."

"You advise me, then—?"

"I leave it to your good sense, seeing where you stand today, what's the only sensible way for you to go."

In a subdued voice, with thoughtful gaze constant to Morphew's, Lanyard repeated: "Where I stand today!"

"Well: where do you? You've got to live somehow, and you only know one way to make a decent living. It's no good your pulling out for Paris or London

again. They read the papers over there, too—they'll never let the Lone Wolf land from any steamer."

"But if they believe me drowned in the Bahamas—"

"Don't count on it," Morphew earnestly counselled. "If you try to shift your scene of operations, somebody over here that maybe doesn't think you've treated him right would be sure to tip off Scotland Yard and the Surétè. See what I mean?"

"You make it all so clear . . ."

"Now on this side you've got everything in your favour. You're back in Town, and nobody knows it but Pagan here and me; all you've got to do is lay low a while, take things easy, and go ahead when you get good and ready . . . providing you're ready to come to terms with me."

"Terms such as—?"

"The same as last Winter; you do the heavy lifting and I take care of the high finance; we split the proceeds fifty-fifty, and you get full protection thrown in for nothing."

"But what of this plagiarist of my methods who has been so active in my absence?"

"Don't let him worry you. I've got a good line on that bird, he won't stand in your light twenty-four hours after I switch on the stop signal."

Over the head which Lanyard bowed in pondering, Pagan shot Morphew a grin of cynical congratulation, to which Morphew returned a quick nod and sign of caution.

"Take your time, think it over," he advised, not unkindly; "I don't want to hurry you. But it's only

fair to tell you, after all that's passed between us, Lanyard, I'd think myself a born sap to take you back on the old terms without conditions."

"It might be well to name them," Lanyard suggested without looking up.

"To begin with, from now on the Delorme is out, I and you will work without any go-between. And then—you'll admit it's only fair I should want some proof of good faith from you."

"For example—?"

"I want the say-so about your first few jobs. You'll have to tackle them under conditions that'll satisfy me you mean to play the game on the level."

"But I fancy you will find it hard to invent such conditions—"

"Oh!" Morphew almost genially laughed—"it's proof of good will I'm after more than anything else. If it comes to that, you won't double-cross me, once you've committed yourself, unless you want to spend the rest of your born days in Sing-Sing or . . ."

The short laugh that filled in the ellipsis brought Lanyard's eyes up to Morphew's once more. "Or—?" he prompted with interest.

"There are some things I don't like to say, when we seem to be hitting it off so nice and easy. I was only thinking—I guess you realize you wouldn't get a great ways with your life if you tried to sell me out again. For instance: Say we should fall out here to-night; know what I'd do?"

"How should I?"

"I'd call in the boys waiting out there in the hall,

have 'em give you a full shave, and turn you loose at Forty-second and Fifth Avenue, while I sat on the steps of the Public Library and split my sides laughing."

"Very ingenious," Lanyard gravely applauded. "But assuming, purely for the sake of the argument, that by means of some equally ingenious shift I should escape unshorn . . ."

"Remember how long you lasted in November, after you'd told me to roll my hoop? Must have been all of twenty-four hours."

"Decidedly," Lanyard observed, "I was unwise to mention murder in your hearing—or would have been, had I seriously entertained any notion of holding out against you, monsieur."

Exultation flickered in Morpew's eyes like northern lights in a moon-blanchèd sky.

"Then it's a bargain?"

"You would not have wasted time offering it had you thought me insane enough to reject it." Lanyard lifted a hand to plead for silence, while the mellow music of a clock in the hall sang through the early morning stillness. "Five o'clock," he said, rising. "Since we are to be so closely associated henceforth, monsieur, I trust it isn't too much to beg the favour of a bed. It has indeed been a long day for me, my head at present is so dull with drowsiness I am hardly in a condition to go further into this new arrangement . . ."

XX

THE sleepiness that Lanyard alleged was no mere subterfuge to end a wearing conversation, the fatigue he felt was all too real, harvest of many toilsome days and nights of broken rest, so real that, once he ceased to stave off its creeping paralysis with inflexible resistance, it overwhelmed him of a sudden altogether. It was with something very like the carriage of a somnambulist that he permitted the still sprightly Peter Pagan to lead him from the library, through a maze of corridors and stairs apprehended as in dream, and leave him at last in a lordly bedchamber.

Here by early dawn-light he undressed like an automaton, fell across the bed rather than laid him down upon it, and in a trice was sleeping heavily. . . .

The sun grew so old its level rays struck in at length beneath the window awning and burned his face with a crimson glare till Lanyard started up, bemused, out of a nightmare of stokehold drudgery—only to fancy himself, with that ruddy beam boring through blue shadow to lend colour to the illusion, back in his stateroom on the Port Royal, waiting for the pretty person of Liane Delorme to justify her knocking of the door.

But nobody had knocked, the band of raw red gold was stationary that barred the dusk, it was a bed that held him, not a berth, the spacious sleeping quarters

of a pampered landlubber were his instead of cramped and bare accommodations aboard an ocean-going boat; and he was quickening to apprehensions of a plight more exigent even than that which Liane had come to tell him of upon that other nightfall, in the Bahamas, weeks ago; by courtesy a guest in the town-house of a new-found ally, in fact no better than a prisoner in the stronghold of his most embittered enemy . . .

Fagged though he had been all through that parley of the small hours, Lanyard had likewise been far too thoroughly alive to its vital bearing upon the issue of whether or not this life of his were worth the struggle, to have slighted any innuendo in Morpew's attitude, however trivial in seeming or elusive. And now recalling, weighing and minutely searching every spoken word and unsaid implication, he perceived no reason for reconsidering his verdict on their consequence, that Morpew's proposal of an alliance had been as treacherous as his own complaisance toward it. . . . A memory the cause of corroding chagrin, to him who had never before met offer of oppression with less than flat defiance, to whom the bare thought of compromise with an overbearing and corrupt antagonist was one to sicken over. He had sour comfort of the saying that it's fair to fight the devil with fire, he would liever have known himself surely the poor thing they pictured him, uncontrollably subject to criminal lapses, than to remember he had been reduced to trafficking with cattle such as Morpew—and on terms of Morpew's choice!

Yet it had been that or worse—a knife in his back,

very likely, before he could find out the truth for himself about those latterday prowlings of the Lone Wolf that enemy and friend alike attributed to Michael Lanyard, that the friendliest guesses ascribed to the cropping out of ingrained criminal proclivities which the best will in the world might neither eradicate nor hope to hold in check.

God knew it might be true! and if it were, then it was time indeed to let Society rid itself of such a menace. But first all doubts must be resolved . . .

Morphew had had the best of him from the outset, had chosen the ground, forced the fighting, outgeneralled him in every skirmish, beaten him down at last to his knees, forced him to stomach quarter on conditions unspeakably humiliating. But better to bow to such abasement than forfeit every chance to clear his scutcheon or, failing, tear him down whose malevolence had been the first cause of its smirching, down from the strong place he had set up to be his refuge, and bury him deep in its ruins—though these bury not Morphew alone.

To compass an end so just, to avenge society as he revenged himself, was the one way Lanyard could conjecture to make amends for being as life had made him; to this he dedicated himself without any reservation whatever, renouncing every cherished prejudice against unfaith and double-dealing, holding no sacrifice whether of scruples or of life itself too heavy a price to pay for its accomplishment, refusing to know any depth of degradation to which he would not gladly descend with the promise that at the bottom he would find Morphew's throat defenseless.

Intuition gave one gleam of hope. Making no claim to the ability to read Morpew's mind, Lanyard assumed with confidence to assay his manner; and recreating this to his mental vision, as it had been manifest in last night's rencontre, estimated every facet of it false. Morpew only too possibly might have been sincere in all he had asserted concerning the recrudescence of the Lone Wolf in the flesh of Michael Lanyard; but his honest scorn, paraded for what he professed to consider disingenuous efforts to hide behind a claim of lost memory, had been in Lanyard's judgment sheerest sham, paste indignation donned for the occasion and, by that token, for some sly purpose. Morpew had taken too much humbling at Lanyard's hands to spare him without some compensating end in view, not conceivably a sordid one alone. If in actual need of money he was little likely to reject it unless Lanyard and none other, operating as a burglar, earned it for him. Power such as he pretended to, intelligently exerted, could hardly have failed to bring to heel that enterprising understudy of the Lone Wolf, who had been so busy all the while that Lanyard had been becalmed in the Bahamas, and bend him to Morpew's purposes as Morpew now proposed to bend Lanyard. So it seemed not unreasonable to assume that the use which Morpew had for Lanyard was another than he avowed, some end that Lanyard alone of all men could serve, therefore not an end of simple avarice—in short, nothing but the satisfaction of some all-absorbing private passion.

Morpew knew, and knew that Lanyard knew—

must have known, or was a denser dunce than Lanyard thought him—that last night's compact had been a farce, that neither of them meant to abide by it one moment longer than suited his convenience, and finally that so long as Lanyard lived and had his liberty Morphey's own liberty if not his very life was in jeopardy. Yet he had preferred that risk . . .

A man so ruled by his passions was surely vulnerable: it remained to bide one's time with every wit wide awake to catch and profit by the first clue that Morphey might let fall, then strike with all the shrewdness one could muster at the weak spot so exposed. Lanyard would hardly have to school himself to patience very long . . .

Arrived at this conclusion, scarcely one to content him, nevertheless the one with which he must for the time being be content, Lanyard permitted considerations of more material sort to assert their claims, with the promptly resultant discovery that he was both sticky and hungry, in sore need of a bath and breakfast. And sitting up, he made another discovery, that his privacy had not been respected while he slept. His weatherbeaten wardrobe had vanished from the chair over which he had thrown it on going to bed; in its place he found a flowered dressing-gown of thinnest silk and a pair of bedroom slippers—a costume supremely suited to such sultry weather, as long as one remained indoors. He perceived himself to be indeed a prisoner.

In the bathroom still a third discovery awaited him when, having turned on the hot-water tap in the tub,

he had his first look at himself in the mirror above the washtand. Mirrors had been rare furniture of the scenes in which his life had been staged of late, and he was interested to view the effect of a six weeks' untamed growth of beard, had been rather looking forward to revising it, as soon as he could lay hands on a sharp pair of scissors, into a neat Van Dyke, a style calculated to be more becoming and hardly less disguising. But one glance showed him that Morpew or another had been beforehand with him, had played Delilah to his Samson while he slept; that wanton luxuriance had been edited already and in such vandal spirit that nothing could now be done for it but shave it off entirely.

Scissors had been left on the glass shelf below the mirror, together with a razor, soap and a brush. In resignation Lanyard clipped and shaved, telling himself that it wouldn't do to resent the impertinence—not yet—it was just Morpew's delicate way of serving notice that Lanyard must not count on any liberty of action unhandicapped by constant danger of being identified with the original of that confounded flashlight, in other words, that any attempt to elude his watchful care would be extremely impolitic.

Later, while he wallowed in hot water, Lanyard heard footfalls in the bedchamber, then a discreet voice just outside the bathroom door.

"I beg pardon, sir, but I thought I heard you moving about. Mr. Morpew's compliments, and you'll be dining out of Town tonight with him and Mr. Pagan; the car is ordered for seven o'clock."

"That's very interesting—thank you. What time is it now?"

"Just on six, sir. I've laid out your dinner clothes, and now, if you wish, I'll fetch your coffee. Perhaps you'd care for grapefruit, too, and a bit of toast."

"I'm sure I would, thanks, especially if I'm in for anything of a drive."

"That I can't tell you, sir—Mr. Morphey didn't say."

By the time Lanyard had finished towelling, his breakfast was waiting. He consumed it in a thoughtful turn, eyeing the array of clothing provided for him, hoping that the tailor who presumably had taken his measure while he slept had been a better man at his trade than the barber who had operated on his beard. But misgivings were groundless; the dinner-coat, most ungainly of garments when it isn't just right, turned out to be a very tolerable fit, and he could not complain of a shortage of anything he required to make him feel entirely at ease—barring money. Even a cigarette-case and a wafer-thin watch with chain of platinum had been fitted into the waistcoat pockets.

Finding himself dressed with twenty minutes to spare, he had the curiosity to try the door. It wasn't locked. He went down the stairs deliberately, expecting at every step to encounter Morphey or Pagan or else discover some servant spying on him. But nothing of the sort: everything was being done to beguile him into believing he was entirely at liberty on his own recognizance. He knew too much, however, to act on any such rash assumption.

He met nobody, for that matter, either in the halls or in the living-rooms, and was twirling lonesome thumbs in the library of mortifying associations when the clock chimed the hour, and promptly the servant who had waited on him upstairs put in appearance, bringing a hat of black felt and a slender stick of ebony, ivory-capped.

"The car is waiting, sir, if you are quite ready."

"Quite — thanks. But Mr. Morpew and Mr. Pagan?"

"They are neither of them at home, sir. I believe it is their intention to meet you wherever it is you are to dine—the chauffeur will know."

"Then I'm to make the trip alone?"

"Yes, sir."

A certain quality of cheek in the way Morpew had made his arrangements won an ungrudged laugh as Lanyard accepted the hat and stick.

The Rolls-Royce landaulet at the door was so brightly blue and sleek it might have been making its first run from the show-room floor. The liveried footman who held its door with all the rare poise of his kind, saluted smartly as Lanyard got in, and smartly doubled round the car to hop up to the chauffeur's side: the vehicle began to move almost before he was formally posed in his place with folded arms. But Lanyard remarked that the rear-view mirror above the wheel was so tilted as to afford the driver a view of the tonneau; and knew by this that to discover symptoms of intending unceremoniously to leave the car would be unwise.

At the same time he inclined to dispute the wisdom that had provided a progress of so much state and ostentation for one so badly wanted; for while it was true enough that the police in uniform were far too busy supervising the traffic of the Drive to have room in their heads for thoughts of the Lone Wolf, it was equally true that plain-clothes men were presumed to be aboard and on the qui vive, it wasn't an extravagant flight of fancy that supposed a chance crossing of trails, a casual look into the car fixing on the features of its passenger and kindling with recognition . . .

But when furtive reconnaissance astern, at intervals in the course of the first twenty minutes, had satisfied him that the landaulet was being discreetly dogged by another car, an unpretentious affair in sober paint occupied by three men of competent presence, compact bodies who rode with eyes alert, and looked quite capable, jointly and severally, of giving a good account of themselves in action, he concluded that it wasn't worth his while to worry about adventitious interference on the part of the police, who, if inspired to such an attempt, would stand about as much chance of stopping the Rolls-Royce and arresting its tenant as the latter would of winning his freedom by means of a flying leap. One might as profitably occupy one's leisure trying to guess one's destination: and the next hour satisfied Lanyard that the route had been mapped with intent to confuse him. For after following main-travelled ways to White Plains, the landaulet and its satellite struck off into a bewildering tangle of back-country roads in which, as night closed down, it was

easy to lose one's sense of direction. Lanyard could only surmise that they were describing a circuitous course to the North and East of Greenwich.

It was hilly countryside they traversed, for the most part thinly settled. Long stretches of lonely road spaced infrequent clusters of farm buildings and cross-road communities. Few other vehicles were encountered. The Rolls-Royce seldom slowed down to forty miles an hour, while the following car closed up till its headlamps lighted brilliantly both sides of the landaulet, rendering it out of the question as well as foolhardy to seek to leave the latter unobserved by a sudden dive into the dark.

Not that Lanyard entertained the remotest desire to commit his fortunes to a hope so forlorn, he was too well possessed by curiosity concerning the nature of the scheme which Morphew was maturing, for Lanyard's introduction to which he had plotted an approach so tortuous, and which that evening could hardly fail to declare. It wasn't in reason that the man should take so much trouble to manufacture an atmosphere of mystery without a purpose of uncommon moment. And if it were true that he had some more than ordinarily devilish project brewing, Lanyard would feel cruelly slighted if denied a chance to get at least a peep into it.

Something after nine the cars picked their way through the outskirts of a town of good size, then found a by-road through open country fragrant with the breath of salt water, leading on to infer that Long Island Sound could not be far away. Properties jeal-

ously enclosed in walls or wrought-iron fences bordered the road, occasional gateways opened up fleeting vistas of drives that led toward lighted windows in the distance. Apparently a community of wealthy landholders . . .

The landaulet turned in at last between two stone piers supporting handsome iron gates, and followed a winding drive through spacious lawns, dimly revealed by starlight, to a porte-cochère. The footman jumped down to the door, Lanyard alighted. As he ascended steps leading to a broad veranda, he heard the Rolls-Royce purr away behind him, and saw the headlights of its attendant car sweep down the drive that curved round to the rear of the house.

The veranda was lighted only by windows opening on it that diffused a gentle glow at best upon patches of flooring set with summer furniture, and deepened the gloom of the spaces intervening. The house was silent, nobody moved in an imposing entrance-hall that was visible through screen doors; and Lanyard pulled up, at a loss for his welcome.

That came, however, without too much delay: a low sweet laugh lifting up from the darkness between the two nearest windows, then a small shape of beauty and gracious animation running swiftly toward him with both hands extended.

He caught them with an exclamation of pleasure, and stood looking in wonder into the smiling eyes of Folly McFee.

XXI

NEITHER less nor more the dupe of vanity than most men of his years, Lanyard rather liked to think of himself as one whom life had lessoned out of all susceptibility to such emotions as that of surprise, a creature of sophistication cynical but bland, weathered by arduous experience and long contemplation of man the slave of folly and the feeble sport of chance until nothing could amaze him. But this contretemps (he couldn't count it better, remembering the genius of its machinery) flawed the picture; Folly's accents with their more than half-pretended petulance startled him awake to the fact that he had been holding her hands for minutes, gaping like a zany, speechlessly confounded.

"I don't believe you're glad to see me!"

"And I—I'm wondering if I am."

"That's not a very pretty speech," she pouted, tugging at her hands till he had to resign them.

"But everything considered, not an unnatural one. You must know nothing had prepared me . . ."

"That's good—because I'd be dreadfully cross if anything had spoiled the surprise."

"Then you can't be cross with me at all."

"I don't know . . ." the young woman gravely doubted. Instinct with that quenchless spirit of coquetry in default of which she had not been Folly,

she posed provocatively to him in the half-light of the window behind her, head daintily aslant, elfin mischief glinting through the dusk that masked her eyes. "I must say you might take it more kindly, seeing how happy it makes me. You don't know how long you've kept me waiting—I'd begun to be afraid you'd backed out of coming after all."

"Then you actually were expecting me for dinner?"

"Of course! without you it wouldn't really be a party."

So much for the suspicion that his escort had mistaken the way and blundered into the wrong premises . . . Then it behooved him to have his wits about him and beware of being misled into taking false steps on such false ground.

"You're an arrant young baggage," Lanyard considered aloud.

"I know—but you're an old hand."

"Then cultivate a bit of reverence for my grey hairs, remember it's not seemly to make mock of your elders."

"Come and sit down, then, beside me." With a chuckle of delight Folly flitted back into the shadows from which she had come, plumped down upon a settee, and patted its vacant cushions with a peremptory hand as Lanyard more deliberately followed. "Do you always insist on having a plot to explain why people request the honour of your presence at their dinners?"

"I have a humble heart," Lanyard protested, sitting; "I am too much mystified to understand why it's termed an honour . . ."

"You're a great bluff—I've told you before. You know very well, most of the people one meets are incurably dull, whereas nothing can cure you of being a most interesting person. That's one reason at least why you're wanted."

"But you are dodging my question. Few people think it an honour to entertain the Lone Wolf—even if they didn't entertain him unawares."

"I don't call that humour," Folly observed, critical. "You can't amuse me by making believe you think I take any stock in all the rotten things people say about you."

"Oh!" Lanyard blankly cried—"you really don't?"

"I should say not—know you better."

Her tone rang true enough, and Lanyard could detect nothing to contradict it in the soft silhouette of her profile against the light.

"It makes me very happy, to think at least one person in the world has faith in me, after all the villainy that's been charged to my account."

"That isn't fair," Folly retorted with spirit: "You never give your friends credit—Morphy doesn't believe it, and neither does Peter."

"To be sure . . . Yes: naturally those two must have talked to you about me."

"You don't suppose they'd have lured you out here to dinner without first getting my permission, do you? If they hadn't, I'd hardly have been so fussed about your being late."

"But that wasn't my fault. I didn't know where I was coming—I could only comfort myself with the

reminder that I was in the hands of—as you point out—my friends.”

“It doesn’t matter. We arranged to make it a late dinner anyway; and furthermore you’re not the one who’s kept it waiting. Morphy and Peter didn’t show up till about ten minutes ago. They had a breakdown or something on the way.”

“I was wondering . . .”

“They’re upstairs in their rooms now, dressing.”

“I hope they don’t hurry,” Lanyard confessed. “I can spare them a little longer, need time to get my bearings.”

“Poor dear!” Folly closed an impulsive hand over Lanyard’s. “It is horrid of me to plague you, isn’t it? But you know how I love fun . . .” She drew away and made herself prim and meek in her corner. “It’s your turn now, I’m perfectly well aware I’ve got questions by the broadside coming. You may fire when ready.”

“But I think you know too well what seems most strange to me . . .”

“All right. I don’t mind telling . . . Yes: this is my place. No: I don’t own it, I just rent it furnished. From Peter Pagan. He’s been such a dear, let me have it for next to nothing for the Summer, and the most perfect staff of servants thrown in.”

“I’m sure that sounds just like him.”

Lanyard meant it. Since it was manifest that Morphey and Pagan were determined to pluck this poor foolish pigeon, and she was madly bent on being plucked, certainly it had been their book to surround

her with a squad of servitors trained to their purpose.

"But that isn't what's most perplexing to you . . ."

"By no means."

"You're perfectly eaten alive by curiosity to know how Morphy got round me, aren't you? Well! but how did he get round *you*?"

Lanyard weakly parried: "Hasn't he told you?"

"Not in so many words. But of course I understand. How could anybody hold out against such magnanimity?"

"How indeed?"

"You weren't to blame for being so cruelly wrong about him . . . about Mallison and Morphy's having had anything to do with my emeralds, I mean. Everything looked so black for him . . . Even Morphy didn't blame you; only, of course, he was half wild at the time, when you didn't give him a chance to defend himself and prove that Mallison had abused his confidence just as he had mine, only more so. But of course he's told you all about that."

"I am none the less interested to learn what he told you."

"Just what I've said, what you know. He waited weeks before he tried to see me again, and spent simple sloughs of money on detectives, trying to find Mallison and bring him back to prove what an ingrate he'd been. Oh! but I wasn't the only one of Morphy's friends that had suffered through taking Mallison on his endorsement."

"I am sure you were not."

"And then, when he had to give that up as hopeless, he got Liane to ask me to give him a chance to explain; and of course, I could hardly refuse to listen. And he's been just wonderful to me ever since. Really, my friend, you don't know what a fine nature he has. Why! he wouldn't let Liane or Peter tell me a word about what he was doing for you, it was only today I wormed the whole story out of him, after he had brought me the good news."

"'Good news'?"

"About your recovery. And when I think of how he took care of you, all those months, after that terrible motor accident, all the while you were out of your head and the doctors held out no hope you would ever be yourself again—when I think of the way he fought to save your mind—and won!—well!" Folly submitted in a voice of awe—"there aren't any two ways of looking at it: Morphy's a sportsman if there ever was one."

"He is," Lanyard cautiously conceded—"unique."

The young woman sat up with an indignant jerk. "Is there a double meaning to that?" she demanded. "Because if there is—I ought to warn you—you'll end by making me dislike you against my will. Oh! I know Morphy has his shortcomings; but so have we all. And I can't believe you so ungrateful . . ."

"But I would be the last man to deny that I owe Morphey a great deal," Lanyard was able to state with entire sincerity. "And some day—it is my dearest hope some day to be able to repay him as he deserves."

"That's all right, then." Mollified, Folly relaxed. "I'm terribly glad."

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"Is it fair to ask why?"

"Because I want you to like him . . . for my sake, you know."

"Afraid I don't know."

"He hasn't told you?"

"I begin to be afraid to ask more questions."

A small gurgle of vanity bubbled out of the shadows. Then Folly thrust a hand into the golden flood that fell through the windows beyond the settee. Upon her third finger a great cabochon emerald shone with soft, unwinking fire.

"It's the finest stone of its kind on this side of the Atlantic," its wearer declared, "outside of my collection. That is, it was outside till Morphy gave it to me."

"You mean—you can't mean you're going to be married—!"

"I don't see what else it can mean—do you?—when we're engaged."

"But are you really in love—?"

"Now really, Mr. Lanyard! do you think it's polite to be so bowled over by the very idea that Morphy could have fallen in love with simple little me?"

"But you—?"

"Well . . ." The suppliant accents of a child caught misbehaving confessed: "you know I've always been crazy about emeralds."

Lanyard let a little space of silence be eloquent for him. When he spoke again it was in another tone, rather a brusque one: "But why the devil did you do that?"

"Oh, I don't know!" Folly sighed in plaintive resentment of such bullying. "He kept asking me, and I didn't know what else to do . . . You weren't there, and I was lonely, and it was raining . . ."

WITH the portentous sweep of a sorcerer's wand one wing of the screen doors near-by swung wide to deliver to Lanyard's stunned recognition the last person in the world he had cared to see just then, a presence of florid allurements en grande toilette. He rose in resignation, telling himself he might have been better prepared, would have been had Folly's most recent confidence broken upon his understanding with force less scandalizing—that the interruption was after all timely, since beyond doubt it saved him from speaking his mind too plainly on the theme of Morpheus as a husband meet for Folly.

The woman at the doorway waited a moment for her vision to accommodate itself to the change of light, then marked him where he stood by the settee and approached with a carriage whose measured grace matched the play of the fantastic fan of plumes she managed, her fine body sinuously undulant within its scanty sheath of lace and satin.

"It is you at last, my friend. One fancied it was your car one heard. . . . But how long since last we met!"

"Too long," Lanyard gallantly insisted, performing a punctilious bow over a hand whose fingers tightened upon his with a significance unsentimental, a brief sharp squeeze that carried a clear message to his discretion:

Folly, he was to understand, knew nothing, and Liane for reasons personal and sufficient held it wise she should continue to know nothing, of that ill-fated flight of their together to the Bahamas.

By way of supplement the throaty voice pursued with heavier stress on the note of professional blandishment: "It is true, then, you have missed me?"

"Ah!" Lanyard gave back agreeably to her humour—"if you only knew!"

"Hark to that grand blagueur!" Liane grumbled to Folly. "Who would believe, to hear him, the last time we met he coldly spurned my love? But it is always so with him, one never knows how to take this fickle animal. Heed what I tell you, who have suffered: do not let him break your heart, too."

"But he has already," Folly stated, deceitfully demure. "If it wasn't for him I would never have had any practice throwing myself at a man's head and falling flat on my foolish face."

"I am too much confused," Lanyard claimed on behalf of his modesty. "These unmaidenly confidences oblige me to change the subject kindly but with decision. Permit me to observe at a venture how ready we aliens are to adopt the tribal customs of this great country, such as the rite of Old Home Week. Tonight, for example, our little circle is completely reunited—with one lamentable defection—"

"Oh, hush!" Folly caught his arm with an imploring hand. "Here comes Morphy; don't let him hear us, the mere mention of Mallison's name makes him simply frantic."

"On your account I promise to be careful. But you really must take the good man in hand and teach him self-control. As your husband, he will be sure to need it."

Folly's eyes flashed up in mute prayer and warning: Morphy leaving the swing-door, was already within earshot. In his wake, as ever at no great distance, the inevitable Pagan strutted.

With that dogged elasticity of gait which men of too certain years and too, too solid flesh affect in their pathetic strivings to seem youthful to the women they prefer, Morpew approached, his dinner clothes, over-cleverly tailored, decked out with a regalia of jewels more than ordinarily shocking, last night's surly truculence now a genial suavity that harked back to the first half-hour of his acquaintance with Lanyard, at the Clique Club so long ago. On his very best behavior, he was apparently charmed to be so. And observing him in covert wonder when, after throwing Liane a light but friendly greeting, he bent his lips to Folly's hand, Lanyard perceived in a blinding flash of divination the chink in the armor of this uncouth colossus: Morpew was madly in love, in bondage absolute to one of those late blooming passions that men know who feel their flesh, still warm from the midday sun, breathed upon by chill premonitions of the night to come.

"Ah, Lanyard, my boy! there you are, eh?" No friend of his heart ever gave Lanyard a more cordial hand. "Sorry Pete and I had to keep you waiting—"

"But I was glad of the chance to find myself in re-

lation to the surprise you had prepared for me—the surprises, I mean.”

A small bow comprehended Liane, who returned an arch look as Folly linked her arm and snuggled.

“Darling Liane is stopping with me for the looks of the thing, to keep my name sweet on the tongue of my neighbours.”

“Pour les convenances,” Liane interpreted for Lanyard with an intonation inimitably droll.

Dinner was announced . . .

Long before that meal was finished Lanyard knew the conviction that never had he sat through a stranger, or one better composed and served, or consumed in an atmosphere of more general amenity.

It would have been anything but easy, for that matter, to be uncongenial under the influences of food of such excellence and so skillfully prepared, wines so well chosen, and the steady flow of high spirits contributed by Folly, Liane and Pagan in tacit collaboration, and encouraged by a surprising display of good feeling in the more saturnine Morphew. Yet Lanyard thought it doubtful if any of his company forgot self or selfish interests for one fleeting instant or pronounced a single unweighed witticism, however spontaneously it might seem to fall.

On his own part, he could not—had he wished—have forgotten the sinister tension of distrust and cross-purpose running through it all; and if he seemed to let himself go and enter without reserve into the frivolous spirit of the gathering, he remained in his heart an outsider to the end, captious and skeptical, and to the

end a prey to dour forebodings. And his attention, ranging in turn from one to another, with a quality of vision inhumanly dispassionate stripped each and every one, even himself, of their trappings of pretension and self deception, and saw the rot that ate at every heart.

He saw in Pagan the perfect pattern of a parasite, fawning on all and sundry for empty laughter, that he might esteem himself a wit and so repair the abrasion of his self-love by the knowledge that he was, at bottom, no better than a pickthank and a pander.

He saw Liane Delorme estranged from these her boon accomplices of yesterday because of Morpew's inexplicable new animus, bitterly stung by the discovery that she who had even been wont to queen it unchallenged was tonight being barely tolerated for what she might be worth toward the consummation of another's corrupt and ungenerous ends; haunted by the incidental knowledge that her charms were day by day more swiftly fading, that their potency once so magical was now nearly spent, and that the increase of her years had brought and would bring no compensating repose, neither the peace that crowns a life well lived nor any surcease from repining.

He saw Folly McFee, a trifling moth, vain, empty-headed, pretty-to-death, avid for admiration to dull the irk of discontent with life for all it had denied her of her heart's desire, for the shabby indemnity it offered her in the shape of Morpew as her promised husband.

He saw Morpew, gross in person, gross in appetites, seeking in vain to slake his lust for power, that

men might look up to him, by fostering those puerile and unprofitable criminal intrigues of his incubation, and at the same time laid so low by love of a doll's face and a pretty body he could not dissemble his fatuous doting or the jealousy that made him sick to his core every time the amorous little baggage of his fancy chose to make eyes at another man.

Finally, Lanyard saw himself, to whom pride had once been as breath of life, broken and degraded to a shameful sort of peonage, constrained to take his orders from a Morpheus and faithfully perform the tasks set for him, lest enemy and patron in one withdraw his favour and leave him without defense against the wrath of a society which his mere existence affronted beyond pardon.

Satyr and sycophant, coquette, courtesan and criminal: a shady crew . . .

And against that ring of worn and raddled faces present in actual being to his sight, hall-marked every one by self-seeking, he had ever before him a face infinitely more real and true, his vision of his lost love, beyond all telling fair and kind, never more near to him than now, nor ever more inaccessibly remote.

And these with whom he sat and dined and drank, with whom he laughed and leered and bandied ribald personalities, were they whose egoism had cost him Eve . . .

Dull rage smouldered in his bosom, he knew he was ripe for murder—and went on feeding and guzzling with them, winking and nudging and giggling with the best of them, put in his proper place by life at last,

relegated to his rowdy sphere, to escape from which he had been insane ever to aspire . . .

Oh, he knew it now! Doubts no more vexed his mind. He was where he belonged, where his own acts had brought him, in the vicious circle of his peers, welcomed and accepted in virtue of the proof he had provided, though unconsciously and without intention, that he was one of them—"guilty as charged," guilty as Hell.

So be it—he was tired of fighting against the fate inherent in his failings, he would fight no more. The destiny of his own architecture must henceforth have its way with him. . . .

Quaint respect for the conventions of another world at length ordained the withdrawal of the women, leaving the men to the walnuts and wine of tradition. And Lanyard, when he got up with the others to bow Folly and Liane out of the room, returning to the table, drew his chair up to the end where Morphew presided.

The curious good nature of the Sultan of Loot was holding up in spite of his bereavement, the temporary defection of the apple of his eye; he felt free to declare the little party an unblemished success; and though he adhered strictly to his plain water régime, he didn't hesitate to hector the servants, who didn't need his hectoring, into producing from Folly's cellar for the delectation of Lanyard and Pagan the rarest of grandes champagnes.

"That's the stuff to go to the right spot," he asserted, with a glitter of envy in his moist eyes of an ex-tank. "Drink hearty, it won't hurt you any, and

there's lashin's more where it came from—though you won't find half a dozen bottles between Maine and California, outside the stock I control."

"Monsieur is a rare judge, for one who never drinks."

"That isn't saying I never did." Vanity grew warm with reminiscence. "Haven't touched liquor in ten years, but my daily average is still high."

"But how seldom does one find a host who has foresworn drink so considerate of the palates of his guests."

"Stick around," Morpew countered in simple pride—and possibly, in Lanyard's judgment, with an *arrière-pensée*—"you'll find out a lot of things about me you don't know, before we part. Besides, tonight isn't every night . . ."

The pause of suspense was meant to provoke the question underlined by arching eyebrows: "No?"

"Want to put plenty of heart into you," Morpew jovially admitted, "so you can put it into your stuff tonight."

With reluctance Lanyard detached a ravished gaze from the amber contents of the glass which he had been holding up to the light. Knitting eyebrows now lent accent of apprehensiveness to the query: "My 'stuff'?"

"Sure thing, your stuff; your act, you know, your turn, your job, the little thing you do better'n anything else."

"Monsieur undoubtedly means my shop—the Lone Wolf's craft."

"Call it anything you like," Morphew graciously conceded—"you know what I mean."

"But—I think monsieur said something about to-night—"

"That's right. Tonight's the night."

With undisguised regret Lanyard put aside a barely tasted glass; whereupon Morphew made a noise of expostulation.

"When the Lone Wolf was at his best, monsieur, he never drank anything if he had work in view. I have had too much already, if I am to believe you are not jesting . . ."

"That's something else you're due to learn when you get to know me better—I never joke about serious matters."

"In effect, monsieur has a great deal in common with humanity," Lanyard observed with a straight face. "It would be interesting, none the less, to learn where he draws the line between the serious and the trivial."

"I guess you won't want to argue that point when you realize the proposition I've laid out for you tonight is one of the biggest contracts you ever tackled."

With a quiet smile in eyes that cast back across a gulf of years, Lanyard pronounced: "I wonder . . ."

"Oh, I know you were a hell-bender in your prime!" Morphew contended—"but when all returns are in you'll be ready to admit you never went up against anything bigger than this."

Did the ulterior thought faintly re-echo in that assertion? With a finesse of which no man was more truly master Lanyard continued to seem astray in by-

paths of diverting retrospection while in reality concentrating keenly critical scrutiny upon Morphew's countenance.

Such pure malevolence as glimpsed in those lightless eyes, in spite of every artifice of hooded lids and webbing wrinkles, was hardly to be taken as the work of a thwarted will to dominate or of mortified egotism merely, but must have been the distillation of an even stronger passion, fear or . . .

"The haul you made of Folly's emeralds that night you were pie-eyed, was a wonder, or would have been if you hadn't lost your nerve; and some of the tricks you've turned since then have been pippins; but to-night's going to make history. You listen to me . . ."

But Lanyard didn't, he heard only a rumour of words whose sense made no impression upon faculties staggered by a thunderstroke of intelligence. The very elaboration of carelessness with which he had named Folly McFee had betrayed Morphew's guarded secret: brute jealousy was the fundamental cause of the hatred in which he held Lanyard, the blind insensate jealousy of an aging man who foresees the failure of his efforts to find in love of woman fuel for waning fires.

Sensitive as he must have been, with that abnormal and abominable sensitiveness from which men of his coarse fiber too often suffer, to the aversion which his caresses could not but excite, to her instinctive shrinking from even the greed of his regard, and conceiving her to entertain a tenderness for the more personable man, the more dashing figure that was clothed as well in the glamour of a wildly romantic history, and the

man who most intolerably was his junior by many years, Morpew—the conjecture gained force of verified conviction in the light of this late disclosure—had decided upon Lanyard's death as the one sure means of healing Folly of her infatuation, and had decreed that it should be brought to pass as an act of justice, approved by custom and the law, meted out to Lanyard while he was engaged in the commission of a felony.

Thus at a stroke he would rid himself of one whom he hated and feared as both a rival in love and an irreconcilable menace to his more material fortunes, prove to Folly she had misplaced her admiration, and clear Hugh Morpew of all suspicion of complicity in that old offense of Mallison and the emeralds; he would even rehabilitate Mallison, if he had any further use for that one, if his indignation on account of Mallison's imputed ingratitude had not been all a blind.

And indeed it was not hard to see how well it would be for all concerned, it might be even for Lanyard himself—it might be even for Eve!—if he were to be found dead the next morning of a bullet fired by an honest man in legitimate defense of his home...

Well for Eve and well for himself if he should meet his end tonight! That thought hummed in Lanyard's head like the refrain of some old song that, once recalled, sings itself endlessly over and over to memory's ear. It intensified the sobriety with which he listened while Morpew laid bare the cheap articulation of his plot, but it was permitted to work no deeper treason; so that Lanyard might very well have

been as he seemed, as Pagan and Morpew believed him to be, impressed to admiration by the finely dovetailed ingenuity and the imaginative daring of the scheme complete.

"The next property to the west"—Morpew flirted an iridescent paw toward that quarter—"is the summer home of the Vandergrifts. Guess you must know who they are . . ."

"As well as you know the fame of Rothschild, monsieur."

"The whole damn family's there just at present: pa and ma Vandergrift—she's sporting most of the Russian crown jewels since the last strike tacked a few dollars per ton on to the cost of coal; the Duchess of Allborough, Theodosia Vandergrift that was, wearing the Allborough diamonds and pearls; Dudley Vandergrift and his wife—her father was Jules Cottier of Cottier's, the French jewellers—"

"But assume the Lone Wolf to be acquainted with the fame of Cottier's, monsieur."

"And a whole houseful of guests—you know the sort. Nobody worth less than eighteen millions is ever invited to one of the Vandergrift house parties, not because ordinary millionaires ain't good enough, but because they'd feel like poor boys at a husking. At a conservative figure there must be upwards of a million in jewels under that roof tonight that belongs to the Vandergrift clan alone. They take good care of it, too. Their guests can do as they please about their stuff, but all the Vandergrifts' goes into the big safe in the library every night. It was built into the

walls when the house was put up, in Eighteen Eighty-five or thereabouts; that's a good enough line on the sort of box you've got to tackle, for a man that knows all you do about safe construction."

"It doesn't sound formidable, assuming your information to be accurate."

"It's accurate, all right; don't let that worry cramp your style. I've been buying up inside dope on this proposition for months, getting it all set for you—had it all but ready to slip you when Liane and you kicked over the traces last Spring. Well—we'd have had to wait awhile anyway for ma and pa Vandergrift to move to the country, and now it's a bigger thing than it would have been any time sooner. So no harm done."

"And this information you have collected?"

"Got it right here." Morpew worried a gold-mounted wallet out of one of his hip-pockets and sorted from its contents several sheets of onion-skin tissue dark with minute pen-work. "There you are: map of the grounds, plan of the house, diagram of the library showing locations of all lights and switches, full notes on the habits of the household—everything but the combination of the safe."

"We left that out on purpose, Lanyard," Pagan smirked across the cloth, "just to make it interesting for you."

Impatiently Morpew thrust the diagrams and notes into Lanyard's hands.

"Everything else you want to know is there. Give it all the once over as soon as you can—we haven't

got time now, ought to be joining the ladies before long—and any questions you want to ask I'll try to answer."

"Many thanks." Lanyard shuffled the papers under a thoughtful frown. "There is only one question I need ask: These fabulously wealthy folk no doubt maintain a corps of night watchmen?"

"That's just where you're wrong," Morpew contradicted in triumph. "There's only one night watchman for the whole works; and he's held the job twenty years and got so old and confident—nothing having ever happened to make him earn his pay—he spends most of his time on duty asleep in a chair by the garage door. He's supposed to make his rounds every hour, but I've fixed it so he'll forget about the three o'clock trip this night anyway."

"You have fixed it?"

"Don't suppose I'm taking any chances of his having a spell of sleeplessness tonight, do you? When he goes to sit down in his favorite chair this time he's going to find a flask that's slipped by accidental purpose off somebody's hip, a flask more than half full of prime stuff."

"Why not quite full, monsieur?"

Morpew winked hideously and laid a finger to his nose. "If that bird sees somebody had a few pulls at it, he won't worry about whether it's prune juice or ill-natured alcohol."

"Forgive my stupidity; now I understand—the cunning hand of Monsieur Pagan will have been at work upon the contents of that flask. How far-sighted you

are to keep a tame chemist. But how will the bottle find its way to the seat of the chair?"

"One of my boys will take care of that, of course."

"You have spies within the gates, then?"

"Haven't I just been telling you I never leave anything to chance?"

"But I should say you leave everything to nothing else, when you repose faith in the loyalty of human hearts. Trust one man with your life, and you forfeit all your right to sleep; trust two, you may count yourself already betrayed. Trust nobody: it is the rule that made the Lone Wolf what he was."

"But you're trusting me—"

"Pardon, monsieur," Lanyard smiled; "but—you will admit—under duress."

"Well! but I'm trusting you—"

"With a cordon of God knows how many spies posted about the Vandergrift residence, beyond, to see that I am not interfered with while at work."

"But that's only a commonsense precaution," Morphey uneasily growled.

"And likewise to see that I do not take it into my head to—how do you say it? double-cross you?—pocket my plunder and neglect to return."

"Nothing like that." Morphey denied, with contempt for the suggestion. "Got too much confidence in your good sense."

"And yet you tell me you leave nothing to chance!"

"You're a great little kiddier, all right." A sour smile commented on the concession. "As far as that goes, I don't expect you back here tonight."

"No?" Lanyard queried in surprise. "You meant to be a consistent gambler, then—trust me to return to New York with my loot alone?"

"Not exactly. You'll need a good car for your getaway, and a racing driver that knows all the back-roads—"

"Ah! not such a besotted gambler after all."

"I've marked a place on the map I gave you, a place just outside the grounds where you'll find a racing car waiting, when you're ready. Once you're in that, and the driver steps on the gas, nothing but an airplane stands a ghost of a show of overtaking you."

"Truly, you have thought of everything . . ."

"I'm that way."

There was a lull. Lanyard with an abstracted air folded the sheaf of papers and put them away in his pocket, then became amiably aware that both Morphew and Pagan were watching his every action with the eagerest interest.

"Eh bien, messieurs! Shall we, as you say, rejoin the ladies?"

"You"—Morphew abandoned all effort to disguise the strain upon his self-control—"you're going to go through with it?"

Lanyard's shoulders were more expressive even than the spoken retort: "What else has one to do?"

Sitting back, Morphew absently mopped his face with a napkin. "One hell of a hot night," he muttered. . . . "That's all right, then. You're such a fire-eater I didn't know but you might try to buck on me at the last minute."

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"Tranquilize yourself, monsieur. My word has been passed. There is but one thing I cannot promise: I may not be able to make the clean sweep of the Vandergrift jewels that you desire."

"What's to stop you, once you get set at that safe?"

"Who knows, monsieur?" Lanyard pushed back his chair. "The element of chance enters into every human affair. Who knows whose hand will cast the dice tonight? Who knows how they will fall?"

To himself he added a cry of despair: "Mother of God! who cares?"

XXIII

THE earlier hours of that night aged without departure from its programme as arranged by Morpew. With entire apathy Lanyard made himself flexible to every manœuvre which that one or Pagan recommended in bogus anxiety "to armour-plate his alibi"—Pagan's phrase, meaning so to colour appearances in advance that nobody would have any excuse for believing Lanyard had not been far from the theatre of the contemplated crime at the hour of its commission. Unshaken assurance that the intrigue had a single object, his permanent removal from Morpew's path at the smallest cost in embarrassment to the latter, prevented Lanyard's lending himself to the artful but meaningless dodges they proposed with anything but the compliance of complete fatigue. It couldn't matter to him what people might think and say of him after that event to whose occurrence he was looking forward with a resignation that, alone of all its preliminary business, afforded him a certain thrill of interest; he wondered a little at the manifestation of such indifference to life in one who had always ere now loved life so well . . .

The sequelae of that mental illness which had blotted seven months out of memory no doubt had something to do with the psychic background to the strange frame of mind which now was his—impossible to surmise how much or how little, lacking as he did the

true data of that eclipse, having to guide speculation only Liane's account and Morpew's, each fragmentary and replete with inherent discrepancies as well as in conflict with the other on points of first importance. And even given a faithful record of all those days and nights when the Lone Wolf had walked and the mind of Michael Lanyard had been dark, still it would need a psychoanalyst to say in what manner and to what degree the after-effects of such an experience might be influencing his mental processes of today.

Not that it mattered now, not that Lanyard really cared; for him it sufficed to have in his heart tonight this living pain of longing for a love forever forfeit through no conscious error or omission, through no volition of his own.

Eight months ago he had reconciled himself to the thought of renouncing his love that Eve might never be made to repent her response, that her faith in him might endure. But since blind fate had conspired with human malice to uproot faith, stamp it out in that kind bosom and destroy it altogether, life held for him no more promise to make it worth the living, he could look back into the very face of death and know never a tremor of dismay. As even now . . .

It was quite true, he was not afraid. He searched his heart and found it steadfast, was confident it would not fail him when his hour struck. He was willing enough to go, only stipulating that when he went he would not go alone, Morpew must go with him. Upon this he was determined, and with so passionate a fixity of purpose that he wondered how Morpew

could be in his company and remain insensible to what was in his mind.

They sat together, otherwise alone, long after midnight, in a sector of the veranda as dark as the house behind it. In the entrance-hall a night-light burned, throwing its dim fan of rays down the steps to the porte-cochère. Liane and Folly had some time since gone to bed, leaving Lanyard to enjoy a "conference" with Morpew of the latter's allegation, before leaving to return to town in the car that had fetched him. The servants, too, were all presumably abed, since Morpew had faithfully acted out the farce, for the benefit of Lanyard, of telling the butler not to wait up and promising to close up the front part of the house in person.

Not long after, the landaulet had ground its tyres upon the gravel of the drive, had stopped beneath the porte-cochère long enough to permit Pagan and Morpew to speed an imaginary parting guest with farewells loud and clear, then had crunched noisily away with Pagan as its passenger, under-studying Lanyard, to be set down outside the gates ere the car proceeded to New York; while Lanyard and Morpew had settled down to await his furtive return afoot.

A lengthy period of what would have been quiet had Morpew not been, as usual, masticating an unlighted cigar, ended in a snort of complacence: "Well! guess we're all set . . ."

"Not altogether."

"What's the matter? Haven't you had chance enough to study those diagrams?"

"I know them by heart. Nevertheless, you have forgotten one essential of my equipment."

"What's that? A jimmy?"

"I seldom use one, certainly shall have no use for one tonight."

"Don't see how you expect to get into the library without something of the sort."

"O you of little faith!" Lanyard laughed softly. "That is a matter for my skill."

"Well! maybe you do know your business best. But considering you don't use tools or soup on a box, damned if I see what else it can be you miss."

"A pistol, monsieur."

Distaste for the suggestion was evidenced by a delay which prefaced the response: "Thought you didn't go in for that sort of thing."

"What sort of a thing?"

"Toting a gun on a job. Thought it was against your principles to be fixed to shed blood if you got in a jam."

"It was. It was likewise contrary to the code of the Lone Wolf to work with accomplices. You have prescribed a new technique for me altogether; you can hardly object if I consent to adopt it only upon provisions which seem to me wise. After all, it is my liberty that is involved—very possibly my life, too."

"All rot. There isn't the slightest danger to you on this job, everything like that has been looked out for."

"You feel sure, monsieur?"

"Positive."

After a pause Lanyard asked: "Tell me, monsieur: have you noticed that, since we have been sitting here, a man has stolen up behind that clump of shrubbery yonder and is keeping watch on us?"

"What's that?" The legs of Morpew's chair grated harshly on the flooring. "What man? Where?"

"You didn't see him, then, as he came skulking across the lawns?"

"No—"

"Then you are not in a position to assert the fellow is not where I have indicated?"

"No—but see here—"

"Be at ease—there is nobody." Lanyard laughed quietly. "But neither am I in a position to assert—and stake my life on it—that I will find nobody on guard in the Vandergrift library tonight. So I will have a pistol for self-protection when I go to pay my call."

"You make that a positive condition?"

"Assuredly, monsieur. And if it comes to that—why not?"

"Suppose you'll have to have it, then."

"A supposition that does great credit to monsieur's efficiency of apprehension. If, however, you are afraid to trust me with firearms, I will cheerfully consent to a postponement till you have had time to think the matter over."

"Why should I be afraid to trust you with a gat?"

"The very question I have been asking myself. Believe me, monsieur, confidence alone can beget confidence."

"You've got me all wrong," Morphew sulkily insisted. "Oh, well! if you've got to have the thing—here."

An automatic pistol changed hands. Making sure that the safety catch was set—which proved that the weapon was loaded and ready for use—Lanyard contentedly dropped it into his pocket.

His first small success to break that tedious tale of reverses . . .

"At last," he announced, "the faithful Pagan!"

"Where?" Morphew goggled blindly at the gloom that clothed the grounds. "I don't see him . . ."

"If your sight by night is no better than that," Lanyard observed, "I feel sure, for the first time, it wasn't you who played Lone Wolf while my back was turned."

Morphew swung himself sharply—and cursed himself sotto-voce for the constructive self-betrayal.

"What put that silly fool idea into your head?"

"Don't be angry, monsieur—it was not said seriously."

A shadow picked out with the white wedge of a shirt-bosom sped lightly across the gravel and up the steps. Morphew's cluck brought it fawning to his side.

"His master's voice," Lanyard chuckled.

"See here!" Pagan bristled belligerently under the lee of his patron, "d'you know you're damned impertinent?"

"Yes."

If Pagan had a retort adequate to the insolence of that monosyllable, Morphew forbade it.

"Here! that's enough. You've been a hell of a long time; what kept you?"

"You shouldn't risk leaving our good friend alone so long," Lanyard cut in. "He's too trustful, people take advantage of his confidence in human nature and over-reach him. Regard that even I have been able to wheedle a pistol out of him while you were playing chuckfarthing on the tombstones—or whatever the mischief was you've been up to."

"Is that right?" Consternation jarred the toady out of his mean rôle for an instant. "What the devil—"

"Calm yourself, my good Pagan. If your terrors were not baseless, I would be making good use of the weapon this instant—if I had waited so long—instead of sitting here and playing the deuce with your nerves."

"Cut it out, can't you?" Morphew muttered. "This is no time to be squabbling like a couple of kids. You need every minute you've got to run over your plans—"

"Quite unnecessary, monsieur; my mind is already made up."

"All the same, it's better we should leave you to think things over—"

"I shall miss you like fun."

"Besides, it's only half an hour more now; and Pete and I want to be in bed and sound asleep by the time you go into action. Anything more you want to take up with me?"

"At this moment, monsieur—nothing."

"Then we'll be going." Morphew heaved out of

his chair. "Good night," he mumbled in heavy effort to sound well-disposed. "Don't let 'em put anything over on you—watch your step."

"I shall not fail to do so." Lanyard was so occupied with cigarette-case and matches that he didn't see the hand which Morphey half-heartedly offered and with ill-disguised relief withdrew. "And you, too, monsieur—dream sweetly and—but surely there must be some appropriate American expression—don't fall out of bed!"

Pagan offered slightly curdled noises of valediction. Lanyard accepted them for what they were worth and dismissed their maker with the same gesture. Like lion and jackal—like a corpulent sloth of a lion attended by an exceptionally spry and pert jackal—the two familiars went into the house.

The front doors were closed and bolted, the shine of their fan-light grew more dull, the stairs complained of a weighty and deliberate tread, windows in the second storey burned brightly for several minutes, throwing saffron beams over the edge of the veranda roof to stain the lawns, then were darkened, Lanyard imagined that he heard a creak—Morphey's bed, or some door resenting an attempt to open it by stealth—and heard nothing more from the interior of the house.

There was no real stillness where he sat, on the edge of the open night. A wind soft and warm was blowing, gravid with presentiments of rain; occasional gusts of sterner stuff wrung aeolian roars from tormented tree tops, sharpened the rattle of leaves incessantly a-shiver, and sent strange, shapeless shadows

scurrying across the lawns like spirits of darkness reft from their moorings in shrubbery and undergrowth. The moon had set, the stars were few and far and faint, vast convoys of cloud cruising beneath them drenched the world with Cimmerian mirk for minutes at a time; a night made to the order of sinners and spies . . .

He knew very well he was spied upon even then, while he sat small and still, his cigarette burning itself out a dozen feet away on the drive, the phosphorescent dial of his watch in the close cup of his palm. A quarter to three—five minutes more . . . He had told Morphey the truth about the man whom he had seen steal up to stand watch over them—more accurately, over Lanyard—from the cover of a mass of shrubbery; had lied in denying the discovery; both for sheer mischievous enjoyment of Morphey's loss of countenance when he saw the whole tissue of his scheme imperiled by the mischance, as he must have reckoned it, of a botched job of surveillance.

Taking fright of what he had overheard Lanyard say, likely enough, that spy had made early occasion to seek a safer hiding place. But nothing persuaded Lanyard that he had marked down the only man assigned to the duty of seeing that he performed in faithful accord with his commitments. He counted confidently on every step of his private *via dolorosa* being dogged by a corporal's guard of shadows . . .

It was, however, in his mind to give them something less elusive than *his* shadow to prove their skill with . . .

At ten minutes to three he pocketed his watch,

opened the large blade of the pen-knife that had thoughtfully been provided him, and inched forward in his chair, eyes to the sky. And when the next great continent of cloud had blacked out the stars for a space and passed, Lanyard's place was vacant; and he, standing on the inside of the french window through which he had in effect dissolved, without causing a sound more than the thin click of a latch prized back by the knife blade, would have risked a round wager that nobody had seen him leave his chair.

He stood in the drawing-room, with every faculty at concert pitch, for more than a minute. But nothing stirred in the entrance-hall, so far as that was disclosed by a wide arched doorway, and he heard no sound from upstairs. Another arched opening joined the drawing to the dining-room, which last was quite black; but he chose that way to his goal rather than brave the lights in the entrance-hall, passed on to the butler's pantry and there hit upon what he had been seeking—the service stairway, unlighted and, at least to the pressure of practiced feet, agreeably taciturn.

Delivered by this route into the hallway of the second storey, and guided by prior acquaintance with the location of Morpheus's bedchamber, Lanyard paused outside its door to unlatch the safety device on his commandeered pistol, then with what was equivalent to a single supple movement let himself into the room.

But the pistol, trained on the bed the moment his shoulders felt the door behind them, fell immediately to his side; eyes that had faithfully guided the errant footsteps of the Lone Wolf through many a blacker

night needed no light to assure them that the room was untenanted.

He reminded himself that Morpew's bedchamber was linked with Pagan's by way of an intervening dressing-room, and found the communicating doors not locked. But Pagan too, it appeared, had been perfidiously remiss in the matter of going to bed. Neither could Lanyard see anything to prove that either man had changed a garment or stopped in his room longer than the lights had burned; which had been just long enough to cover the time it ordinarily takes a man to shed his clothes and otherwise prepare for bed.

In that first dash of disappointment Lanyard was tempted to believe that Morpew's bag of tricks boasted as deep a bottom as his own. He was criminally spendthrift with his time, however, every second that he delayed there, scolding himself for his want of prevision, his idiocy in trusting the pair of them an inch out of his sight—while they were abroad, out there in the night, marshalling their forces, picketing every possible avenue of escape, leaving open to him only the way he was pledged to go—and setting their trap at its end.

He returned the way he had come, opened the door of Morpew's room, slipped out with all haste compatible with prudence—and found his retreat cut off.

In night dress and *négligé* Folly McFee stood between him and the head of the main staircase, which he would have to pass to regain the service stairs.

The hallway was without light other than leakage from the entrance-hall by way of the staircase well, a

faint diffusion, barely enough to define the shadows, seemingly enough for Folly notwithstanding, since she betrayed neither dread of the marauder nor doubt of his identity, nor yet any astonishment to see him there who should have been twenty miles away.

In accents circumspect but crisp and even she demanded: "What are you doing there?"

With a shrug Lanyard put away his pistol. He had been wretchedly premature, he perceived, when, having bluffed Morpew into giving him that weapon, he had congratulated himself on the turn it signalized in the tide of his luck.

"Dropping in on your dear betrothed," he replied, moving nearer, "just by way of giving him a glad surprise."

She had no patience for such ill-timed levity. "What do you mean? What did you want with Morpew?"

"If you must know, I meant to invite him to take a walk with me."

"At the pistol's point!"

"Precisely."

"Well!"—a note of scorn sounded in her voice, or Lanyard was deceived—"why didn't you? Wouldn't he go?"

"I regret to report that the gentleman is not at home."

"Not—!" Acute dismay drove the woman back to the rail round the well. A hand flew to her lips as if to muffle them. "Morpew isn't in his room?"

"Neither is Pagan; I'm afraid they are up to some sort of naughtiness."

"For God's sake! don't joke." Folly flew back to him, laid hold of his arm with hands of almost savage entreaty. "Don't you see your danger? Don't you *know* what they intend?"

"Too well. That's why I wanted Morphey's company on my walk—not the best life insurance one could wish, but better than none."

"Ah! but why"—now the woman was almost sobbing—"why didn't you run for it while you had a chance?"

"For the best of all reasons—I hadn't the chance."

"But they left you alone down there on the veranda—"

"Half a minute." Lanyard firmly freed his arm and caught her wrists instead, applying pressure enough to command attention. "You knew that much, knew I hadn't gone off in that car—"

"Of course."

"How much more do you know?"

"There isn't time to tell you. Be content that I know everything—"

"Why he brought me here tonight?" She nodded.

"What he's forced me to promise I'd do?"

"Everything, I tell you!"

"In the name of wonder! how?"

She gave no answer. The quiet of the hour took up their hurried, low-pitched murmurs as blotting-paper takes up ink. They stood without moving, close together, like lovers. He was aware of the hastened movement of her bosom, and though the glow from below was too feeble to read her face by, fancied that her eyes were louring.

"Tell me how you know . . ."

"Please! you hurt." She made him loose her wrists, yet did not move beyond his reach. "Enough that I do know," her whisper insisted. "My name may be Folly, but I'll prove to you yet I'm far from a fool."

"You claim that," Lanyard retorted, "yet you're going to marry Morpew—"

"And you believe it!" She laughed bitterly. "Now you tell me, which of us is the fool?"

"It was you who informed me. How do I know what or what not to believe? I'm like a man newly blinded, groping my way round a strange house, hoping against hope to find a friend's hand—"

"Here . . ."

Lanyard set his lips to the hand Folly flung him, and folded it between his own.

"Then tell me—"

"I can't, there's no time. You must go—go at once—save yourself before they can come back and catch you here."

"Not a step till I know."

"Oh, you will drive me mad!" Amazingly, on top of that, the slender body shook with guarded laughter. "Very well, then! I'll tell you—but on two conditions: You must promise me to go immediately after, and not to let Morpew suspect. I want to be the first to tell him, and see his face when he learns . . . I've had dictographs wired in all through the house."

"But—good God—for what purpose?"

"You're *so* stupid!" The rug deadened the stamp of a frivolous slipper. "Why do you think I can



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whether you go or stay? Why do you suppose I ever let them think they'd got round me again? Only because I wanted to help . . ."

"For my sake!"

"You're not really stupid, you know," Folly commented, and whipped her hand back into her own keeping. "You've known all along . . . Now keep your promise and go. Get as far away as you can and . . . Give me a ring in the morning, I'll tell you what has happened."

"'What has happened'!" On the point of taking her at her word, Lanyard checked in suspicion. "What can happen, if I let Morphew down?"

"You don't think that would stop him? You don't know that monster. I heard him tell Pagan, if you should fail him tonight, refuse to go through or succeed in escaping, there would be a robbery just the same, and of course you'd get all the credit."

"You were right," Lanyard affirmed. "There's no time to waste."

Too late the young woman saw her error and sought to detain him by putting herself in his path.

"What are you going to do?"

"Bid you good night."

Lanyard's hands clipped her elbows to her sides and lifted her bodily till her face was level with his own. Soundly if hastily kissed, she was set to one side, and when she recovered was alone.

XXIV

A WILDER spirit now ruled the night: the freshening wind blew with zest more constant, with briefer and less frequent lulls, the trees it worried fought back in bootless fury, with thrashing limbs and lows of torment, a heavier wrack coursed the skies, the blinded stars found fewer rifts through which to wash the world with their troubled and misleading light. Lanyard, traversing an unknown terrain, with nothing but impatient memories of Morphew's rough sketch-map to guide him, threw caution to the very wind whose wanton spirit shouted down his noisy flounderings, and shouldered headlong through hedges, coppices and thickets, reckless whether or not he were heard or seen and followed. His prayer, indeed, was not so much that he might give Morphew and his crew the slip, as that chance might throw him into direct personal collision with his enemy.

From that moment, when, after dinner, Morphew had first broached his mind on this foray and Lanyard had taken the tacit implication that he might refuse to play his part appointed only by dedicating himself to an early and a wasted end, he had been determined to find some means—and the fouler the fitter—of coercing Morphew into keeping him company step by step and sharing whatever fate would be his in the outcome.

From the moment when his hand had closed upon the grip of the pistol which he had talked Morphew into trusting him with, he had felt fondly confident, not that he would escape with his life, but that Morphew shouldn't.

Now to find his plan of campaign anticipated, and with a readiness and thoroughness to warrant the belief that his most secret thoughts were not safe from Morphew's acumen, infected Lanyard with a phase of madness, with an actual mania: he was a man-killer in intention as he blundered through the dark, he had fixed in mind a solitary thought, to be in time to abort the proposed burglary by taking Morphew's life. The penalty for that would be so little to pay for vindication of himself to himself—to Eve: the tale would surely find its way to her, some day, wherever she might be; some day she would learn how and why he had died, would understand . . .

He found himself finally at check on the fringe of a black spinney, peering across a hundred yards of lawn at a pale, columned façade that loomed against the confused sky with a certain stateliness of line and mass.

The dwelling seemed to be fast asleep. In the intervening open nothing human moved: only the by-standing trees tossed their arms and lamented as they looked on, like a grouped chorus morbidly curious.

If Morphew and his lot were about, they were keeping to good cover.

The Lone Wolf in his day would have rendered such discretion tribute of slavish flattery, would have picked

his way toward the house from shadow to shadow, taking profit of the shelter afforded by every bush and bole between him and his objective, like an Indian stalking his kill: the Lanyard of that night struck straight away across the lawns at the top of his speed. The worst that could reward such audacity would be an attempt to overhaul or intercept him, in which event there would be gun-play, Lanyard could promise that, a fusillade sure to give the alarm: better the hazard of that than to lose precious minutes trying to avoid being seen, thereby granting the thief in the house the time he needed, if he knew his business, to consummate his purpose and escape.

For the thief was in the house already: Lanyard's first cast across the lawns at the wing that held the library—with whose location Morphey's ground plan of the dwelling had made him acquainted—had been repaid by discovery of a lancing play of light in the dark beyond the windows, the thin, broken and restless, blue-white blade of an electric torch in hands either cynically indifferent to detection, or absurdly amateurish.

He would be in time—perhaps. If so, with none to spare. He pelted madly toward the veranda, took its steps at a stride and, with calculated intent to make all the noise he could and bring the household down about his ears and that other's, battered a shoulder like a ram against the joint in the middle of the nearest window.

It gave with an ease he hadn't discounted, its wings flew open with a sounding crash; and tripping on the

sill Lanyard tumbled in on all fours, while the walls bellowed with the report of a pistol, and broken glass showered about him, tinkling and clashing.

Instantly he reared up on his knees, as a man will when mortally hit, flopped to one side, out of that too exposed position in front of the window, and lay very still, his own pistol ready, his vision probing the obscurity for some sign of stir.

The electric torch defeated that effort. It had been dropped with switch set, at the instant of Lanyard's violent entrance, and now lay at some distance in from the windows, its beam steadfast to the front of an opened safe; manufacturing a wide patch of vivid colour that made the encompassing mirk more dense, too dense for penetration by merely mortal eyes. Lanyard, at least, could see nothing else; and though he distinctly heard the pile of a rug whisper to a movement of sly feet, it passed his perceptions to determine the quarter in which that rustle had its rise. It ceased of a sudden, and he heard nothing more, other than the swish and flap of the curtain bellying in from the shattered window.

The burglar hadn't left by way of any window, he was certain; therefore was still in the room, waiting like Lanyard for some incautious sign to guide his aim. But to play a waiting game with him would be intolerable, and too apt, as well, to end in precisely that which Lanyard was bent on preventing, the intrusion of some member of the household to draw the marauder's fire. The raving of the wind in the trees made it impossible to distinguish lesser sounds from beyond

those four walls; but it was hardly conceivable that the rending crash with which the window had admitted Lanyard, the shot that had followed, and that loud rain of splintered glass, should have failed to alarm every inmate of the house.

Lanyard conjured up to the eye of his mind the plot of the library he had studied at Morphew's instance. According to it—as memory served—the window he had broken through was the one nearest a wall in which (close by Lanyard's head it ought to be) a double doorway opened in from the main hall of the house, with a switch for the ceiling light conveniently at hand.

Gathering himself together, Lanyard rose in a reckless bound and lunged blindly toward the door, found it where he had thought it ought to be, and began to grope for the switch.

His first fumbblings were wide of their mark, but he persevered, heart in mouth, expecting every moment to see the black backwards of the room stabbed by a jet of crimson and orange flame—perhaps to be lucky enough to hear the accompanying blast. But the other held his fire, no doubt shrewdly guessing what Lanyard was up to and reckoning it the part of wisdom to wait for the light to make his aim sure; the advantage would be all to him when it came, for he would know approximately where to look for Lanyard, whereas the latter had no clue whatsoever to the whereabouts of his adversary.

His fingers at length hit on the switch, a great central chandelier sprayed the room with radiance.

Lanyard occupied it alone, at least seemed to: the library was over-furnished with huge, old-fashioned pieces, any one of which might easily have been serving the safe-breaker as a temporary screen, from behind any one of which Lanyard had to look for his coup-de-grâce to come at any instant. . . . Or, he dared not be unmindful, that might come through one of the windows. Doubt of his temper could now no longer exist in Morphew's intelligence. The one slender chance Lanyard had of eluding a bullet from either the outlaw in the room or the assassins outside lay in keeping constantly on the move.

He quartered the library with swift strides, bent almost double, zig-zagging from the shelter of one article of furniture to that of the next, and finding the other man nowhere. In this manner he circled a massive table of old oak that occupied the middle of the floor and was passing the violated safe when the toe of one boot struck something that incontinently, in effect, came to life, and slithered away across the hardwood like a serpent of light.

Involuntarily Lanyard pulled up, stooped lower, and retrieved the thing: a diamond necklace of all but incalculable worth.

His breath stuck in his throat, his heart stood still, his consciousness was in an instant sponged clear of every other thought than this: he knew that necklace, knew it almost as well as he knew the palm of his hand, and knew it had no business being where he found it, three thousand miles and more from the home of its owner in the south of France.

Like a man in hypnosis measuring his actions in obedience to the will of another, without taking his eyes from the necklace Lanyard stood up, put his pistol down upon the table, and used both hands to straighten out the string of blue-white stones and held them to the light.

Veritably Eve's . . .

Unaware of any noise of warning, again like the subject of a hypnotist, he slowly turned his head, and saw Eve standing in the doorway, a vision of loveliness unflawed by any fault, supremely gracious of line and warm of colour in that austere frame, beauty stricken by sorrow posed against a tall black panel.

One hand held the door-knob, the other at her bosom clutched together folds of a gossamer robe she had thrown over her shoulders on getting out of bed. Her lips, barely parted, were silent, her unswerving look was dark with amazement and reproach.

Twenty seconds tolled by thunders wore out of Lanyard's ken: he remained, like Eve, transfixed, his eyes mirroring in some small part his mind's stark disarray . . . reading in hers sick contempt to see him standing there, caught red-handed at the Lone Wolf's base business, the man she had given all her trust and love to surprised in the act of thieving the jewels of the woman he had professed to adore . . .

And then wonderfully she moved, advanced a pace or two out of the doorway, and lifted to him hands of charity and suppliance, her countenance mild and kind for him, that voice of sweetness incomparable tenderly fluting one word of entreaty, his name:

"Michael!"

Existing then only in her love and in the love he bore her, forgetting all else in life, Lanyard came to himself in trembling, and stumbled toward her hands . . .

It was the swift change of her expression that halted him, the startled dread that afflicted her as something at his back drew her attention.

Galvanized by that hint of peril to his beloved, Lanyard whirled on a heel. But the cry of angry challenge that rose to his lips was audible only as a broken rattle, he was instantaneously stricken to futility to find himself confronted by Michael Lanyard his living apparition.

It was like a trick of delirium, a phantom parody of Lanyard materialized from behind a huge wing-chair beyond the far end of the table: his counterfeit in every particular of dress and feature, his facsimile grotesquely forged.

One look recognized the likeness and its fraudulence; that is to say, assured Lanyard that he wasn't confronting a mirror. A gleam of grim joy shone on his features. He covered in a leap half the distance between them, saw a pistol in the grasp of the impostor swing level with his head, ducked before it spat. His own weapon was out of reach, but the string of diamonds in his hand licked out from it like a whiplash of white flame, and fell squarely across the other's eyes. A second shot went wild as the man's head jerked back from the stinging impact of the stones. And then Lanyard was at his throat . . .

The sheer fury of his onslaught bore both back to the wing-chair and over its legs as it toppled and fell on its side. The pinned wrist of the hand that held the pistol was twisted with such cunning that the fingers relaxed, the weapon described a flashing arc through the air, dropped to the polished floor, and slid a dozen feet away from the combatants. Even more to the purpose, when that writhing tangle of bodies resolved itself, Lanyard was on top. But the under dog rallied with the fury of one fighting for his very life, and rained brutal blows on Lanyard's face. Indifferent to these, Lanyard dug both thumbs into the fellow's throat and slowly but savagely choked him into semi-strangulation.

He lay still at length, gagging and wheezing, tongue protruding, eyes starting from their sockets. And Lanyard released his pressure on the windpipe only to twine vindictive fingers into the hair of his victim and tug for glory and the Saints—till a wig and false forehead en bloc came away in his grasp.

After that it was the work of half a minute to snatch a handkerchief from a breast-pocket, scrub off most of that mask of grease-paint, and bring to light glimpses of the ruined beauty of the dancing yegg.

Eve's shadow fell athwart the two, and Lanyard, for all the labouring of his lungs, had an irrepressible chuckle as he looked up into her bewildered face.

"Permit me to introduce the Lone Wolf's last incarnation!" he cried, and jumped up, brandishing the scalp he had taken—"known to the police and social circles of the cabarets as Henry Mallison—Mally for short!"

XXV

NO responsive elation lightened the dark regard that shifted from Lanyard's face to Mallison's and back again, only a smile pitiful and chiding dawned. "So this," Eve slowly said, and slowly shook her head at the man who loved her, "is why you ran away!"

That look he could no more interpret than he could the riddle of her words; both he requited with a muddled stare. "I?" he blankly wondered—"ran away—?"

She nodded once. "But you didn't know, I'm sure, what you were doing then; it's natural you should not remember. You are yourself tonight—you were not, then."

"Yes," he cried—"thank God! tonight I am myself . . ."

One of her hands went out to this, he caught it between his own, was drawn by it to her bosom. Common impulse moved them aside and away from the man they had forgotten, the man who lay sobbing and fighting for breath on the floor beyond the desk.

"So you come back to me!" It was as if in the gaze that plunged into her eyes his very soul passed out from him to lose itself, and all awareness of the world without themselves as well, in that treasury of love illimitable and incalculable which those eyes dis-

closed. "So, as I knew you would, you come back to me at last, your honour cleansed! Michael," the woman breathed, yearning to him—"my Michael!"

"What are you telling me? I ran away from you—!"

"Three months after you were injured in that motor accident, while your memory still was uncertain, when often you couldn't recall one day's events on the next x x x without a word of explanation or farewell, one day you left me, disappeared . . ."

"*Left you!*"

"I knew, of course, why . . . It was when the papers were revelling in the sensational 'return'—as they called it—of the Lone Wolf. I had tried to keep it from you, fearing the consequences of the excitement, in your condition; but the hue and cry was out for you, I was at my wits' ends to hide you away from the police, it was necessary to tell you why . . . What I had so feared happened: you brooded incessantly, whenever your mental condition made you forget the affair for a time—as when you'd wake up from a sound night's sleep remembering nothing of the previous day—something was sure to happen to remind you. A hundred times you begged me to let you go, that you might find and expose the scoundrel who was masquerading in your reputation; I knew you were incompetent for that, at the time, and always managed somehow to talk you out of it, until—as I say—abruptly, without word or sign, you left me."

"*Left you!*"

"Ah! but you don't know." Her smile grew gently

arch, fondly teasing. "Don't you, my Michael! even remember—"

She gave a startled movement, averting her attention to the windows, her body became tense in his embrace, her hands convulsively tightened upon his shoulders.

The veranda was booming with a sudden, concerted rush of many feet. Lanyard offered to release the woman, but she clung to him as if in terror; and at the last he had to use his strength, because he foresaw what was to befall, forcibly breaking her hold and throwing her from him lest she share a peril that, he was resolved, must at any cost be his alone.

Crying out, not loudly but in protest and solicitude for him, she staggered back; and Lanyard turned toward the desk to retrieve his pistol—too late. Already a man was shouldering in through the broken window. He brought up standing with an automatic trained on Lanyard.

"Stick 'em up, my man!" he rumbled—"and be quick about it."

Lanyard was quick about it. His own weapon lay on the far edge of the desk, at least eight feet away; before he could have covered half that distance a bullet would have stopped him. Hands level with his ears, he swung slowly to face Morpew.

Gross, ungainly, panting, rocking from one to the other of his heavily planted feet, the Sultan of Loot stood with head slightly lowered and thrust forward, face of a pig hideously twisted by a leer of malice successful and exultant.

Behind him the window filled with followers,

through it half a dozen defiled into the room; three who were immediately identified as individuals of Morpew's bodyguard who had helped manhandle Lanyard in the Morpew town-house the night before; after these, the inevitable Pagan, strutting, smirking; finally, two that were new figures in Lanyard's sight—one an able-bodied young Irishman in police uniform but lacking that elusive poise which somehow distinguishes members of the New York police force, the other a simple citizen proudly parading a nickel-plated badge on the bosom of his waistcoat.

"And keep 'em up, Lanyard!" Morpew was admonishing in an uglier note of malice. "Don't take any chances with me this time—if I have to shoot, I'll shoot to kill. You're caught at last, caught with the goods on!"

"'Caught'?" Eve de Montalais challenged. She stepped forward, coming between Morpew and his chosen prey. "What are you saying? Caught doing what?"

A mottled fat paw impatiently waved her out of the way; Morpew's dourest scowl covered her. "Stand aside, madam!" he growled. "Don't make me take a chance of hitting you; that man's a desperate criminal, if you don't know it; the first move he makes, I'll fire—"

"But I do not know he is a desperate criminal," Eve sharply contradicted. "As for you, whoever you may be, I think you must be mad . . ."

"I guess you are," Morpew brusquely retorted. Yet his slotted eyes winced from hers. "Caught him

yourself — didn't you? — just now, robbing your safe—"

"And if I did?" the woman surprisingly quibbled. "What concern is that of yours? Have I invited your interference? Have I asked your help in the management of my own affairs?"

"Maybe you haven't," Morphew sullenly contended — "but you're getting it whether you want it or not—"

"With what authority, pray?"

"My authority, madam!" the man retorted in open rage — "the authority of an honest, law-abiding citizen. I've been after that yegg there for months. Now I've got him, by God! he don't escape with his life." He jerked a peremptory head at the policeman and the man who sported the nickel-plated badge. "Take your prisoner, Mr. Sheriff—"

"One moment!" Eve interposed a ringing demand that halted these two before they had fairly got in motion to obey Morphew's behest. "I am the householder here, if you please—you'll arrest nobody on these premises without my sanction or a proper warrant. This gentleman has done nothing to deserve arrest—"

"Nothing?" Morphew jeered. "You call burglary nothing?"

"He has committed no burglary—"

"Didn't break into this room and bust open that safe, I suppose?"

"To the contrary," Eve asseverated, "Mr. Lanyard is here in his own right; more than that, he has prevented a burglary—"

"A likely story!" Morpew commented with a snort of grim derision. "If he didn't do it, I want to know who did!"

"But allow me to answer this honest and law-abiding citizen, madame," Lanyard lightly put in. And wittingly at risk of his life he lowered one hand to touch the woman's shoulder as he moved to one side, that she might no longer persist in shielding him with her own body. "Permit me to relieve the confusion of mind which distresses the amiable Monsieur Morpew—"

"You keep your trap shut!"

"Softly, my good Morpew! I am about to do you a service—appreciating as I do how worried you have been, and how pained, by the ungrateful behavior of your tool and accomplice, Mal—"

"Shut your mouth, d'you hear?" Morpew bellowed, swaying his huge head upon his shoulders like an infuriated animal about to charge. "Take your prisoner, Mr. Sheriff! If this woman won't charge him with the burglary he's committed here tonight, I charge him with breaking into my house in New York last night—"

The bellow ran out in a gasp that was followed by a choking noise. A long arm had shot out over Morpew's shoulder from behind, and the bony but powerful hand at the end of it had closed upon his wrist, jerking the muzzle of the pistol toward the ceiling. As he swung round with an incoherent roar another hand, the mate to the first, deftly seized the weapon and twisted it from his grasp. He stared, in apoplectic

speechlessness, into the countenance composed yet sardonic of Crane.

Unobserved by anybody other than Eve and Lan-yard, the detective had quietly stepped in through the open window, closely followed by an associate, a mild-mannered body hall-marked police detective by the derby hat of tradition.

"Y'oughtn't to get gay like that with loaded fire-arms," Crane counselled in gently pained reproach—"y'ought to know better, a man your age!" His mouth hardened and he clamped fingers like the jaws of a vice on Morphey's shoulder, nipping truculent bluster in the bud. "Crane's my name, if you want to know, but bull's my nature, Mister Morphey; and remember this"—eyes that had the glint of steel between narrowed lids cowed Morphey's—"I don't ask no better luck than for you to give me a good excuse to get even with you for all the trouble you've been putting me to, first and last. Keep a civil tongue on your head if you value your health!"

Morphey cast glances mutely eloquent of tormented appeal to his henchmen; but they were one and all inattentive, to a man preoccupied with the attitude of Crane's associate. And yet it had all the seeming of the most inoffensive attitude imaginable. The mild-mannered man was doing nothing whatever more than mildly keeping mild eyes on them and his hands in his overcoat pockets. It is true that both the said pockets boasted singular bulges, as if two forefingers of derision were being pointed under their cover . . .

"But what the—who the—what the hell right 've you—?" Morphey stammered.

"Well!" Crane chuckled, "I don't know. Kind of thought I'd drop in and see how your little frame-up was working. Got the hottest kind of a tip half an hour ago . . . Give you three guesses where it came from." One of his eyebrows climbed his forehead on a slant, giving his face a diabolically whimsical cast; his thin-lipped mouth widened in an unkind smile. "Never mind guessing, Morphy, spare the old intellect the strain. Here she comes now . . ."

A vision of elfin fantasy, with a fur-trimmed opera-wrap of crimson and gold brocade negligently draped over her déshabillé, who quite frankly hadn't stopped to dress, Folly McFee airily sauntered in from the veranda and paused and posed, reviewing the tableau with glances of mischievous amusement.

"Why, Morphy!" in affected solicitude she cried—"whatever has happened? You look fussed to a perfect frazzle . . ."

"Best little side-kick any guy ever worked with," Crane quite seriously affirmed. "Take it from me, Morph old boy, I'll look a long ways before I find another little lady like that, who won't even stick at letting her name be linked with the name of a mongrel like you, just to get the low-down on your naughty little ways and shoot the information along to yours truly."

A shove, seemingly playful and effortless, nevertheless shook the balance of that hulking body; Morphey staggered back a step or two, regained physical equilibrium with some effort, and braced himself like a badgered brute in a bull-pen, feet wide apart, head

swaying low upon hunched and rocking shoulders. Rage and chagrin lent wattled cheeks the complexion of flesh sorely bruised, his lower lip was pendulous, his hooded light eyes, their whites newly shot with congested blood, were wickedly agleam.

Lanyard, watchful, ready for anything now that Crane had deprived Morpew of his pistol, told himself he had never seen a man more nearly out of his mind with fury, had never encountered at close quarters an animal more dangerous.

"But will you kindly look who's here!" Crane's happy drawl was hailing—"as I live, old Hank Mallison, the spring-heeled yegg, none other!"

Only his mild-mannered colleague had no attention to spare for the spectacle of Mallison, like a spectre in a pantomime, slowly and laboriously, with the help of hands that clutched the desk, hoisting himself into view.

"Folks!" Crane solemnly declared—"I'm an officer of the law and everything, but this is one big night. It ain't every night a poor dumb dick like me is privileged to gaze upon the only authentic pirated copy of the Lone Wolf. So if I can only wheedle our friend here, the King of the Bootleggers, into selling me a bottle of his best bootliquor, the drinks are on me, all round!"

On his feet at length, Mallison rested, trembling visibly, still stupid with the effects of the thrashing he had suffered at Lanyard's hands. In a face that retained recognizable traces of his make-up as the Lone Wolf, his eyes had something of the bewildered

look of a beaten dog's—but for the merest instant only; terror replaced it in a twinkling when his puzzled, questing glances discovered the presence of Morpew.

There was an instant then that was gravid with presentiments of tragedy, in which no one spoke, no one stirred from his place, no one moved in any way but Morpew—for Mallison seemed frozen to immobility by sheer fear.

Morpew was crouching lower, gathering himself together. The hands that had been hanging limp lifted and tensed into the likeness of great livid claws that itched for Mallison's throat. Morpew's lips had rolled back from his teeth, from deep in his throat a dull, brutish growl was rising. Of a sudden it waxed to an inhuman howl, and simultaneously that ponderous bulk of flesh launched itself like a thunderbolt incarnate across the room . . .

In its third stride it was stopped and thrown back as if it had dashed itself against an invisible barrier. Mallison had found Lanyard's pistol and fired. He fired again as Morpew was falling. But his third shot ploughed the ceiling. Lanyard had gone into action while the first report was still a noise of deafening reverberations in the room; resting his hands upon the top of the desk, he vaulted it, his feet striking Mallison's chest. The man went down with Lanyard on top of him . . .

XXVI

"SIMPLE enough," Crane opined, "like all these funny little games crooks frame up, once you locate the chink that gives you a look in at the machinery."

He stood in the main doorway. Behind him the wind-swept sky was dull grey with the dusk of a new day. On the drive, at the foot of the veranda steps, a motor-car was waiting, Pagan and Mallison on the back seat with the mild-mannered man, the left wrist of the latter hand-cuffed to the right of the dancing yegg. Another car that could be seen in the distance, turning out of the grounds to the highroad, was carrying away Morphew's henchmen under guard, in the wake of an ambulance from the nearest hospital that had arrived just in time to receive the lifeless body of the Sultan of Loot.

"If crooks could think straight, they might make good, once in every so often; but they can't, that's why we call 'em crooks; and that's why everything they cook up and make such a mystery of is so blamed silly and childish when you come to take it to pieces. Here's Morphew, the biggest frog in his pond, going off his nut with jealousy because the little McFee lady liked Lanyard a whole lot better'n him, and getting Mallison to play Lone Wolf and pull off a couple of jobs so's

Mrs. McFee would see what a sap she'd been, falling for a so-called reformed crook. And here's Mallison getting chesty because he's doing the Lone Wolf act to the Queen's taste, and giving Morphey the double-cross—which was plain suicidal mania, if you ask me—and trying to go on with the game on his own. And then there's the Delorme woman, kidnapping Lanyard while he wasn't mentally responsible, with the notion, as near's a body ~~can~~ figure it, she could make him believe he belonged to her and had gone wrong again, so the only thing for them to do was to team up and collect a handsome living from the world at large . . .”

He smiled a vaguely pitying smile at nothing in particular. “These things wouldn't ever happen,” he concluded, “if all crooks weren't crazy. . . . Well! time I was on my way.” He bent with unexpected courtliness over Eve's hand, and shook Lanyard's. “The top of the morning to you, madam. So long, Lanyard—we won't say good bye—and the best of luck!”

The tyres crunched loudly on the cracked stone of the driveway, the high wind raved about the house and soughed through the tossing limbs of trees; but between Eve and Lanyard there was silence, on her part the stillness of tranquil expectancy, on his the dumbness of constraint.

“So it comes true,” he said with a bleak smile, mustering up heart to meet her eyes at last—“what I foretold in the beginning. Say good bye to me, Eve, and let me go.”

The hand he offered to take did not move to meet his. "Where will you go?" she quietly enquired.

"Back to England," he said in a sigh—"I suppose—as soon as I can get in touch with the Secret Service and request my recall. That is, if they'll have me again, after their faith in me has been sapped by this Mallison business. It's a question of what and how much they choose to believe."

"That will take a few days at least," she gravely considered. "I shall have plenty of time to wind up my small affairs in this country—I shall be ready, Michael, whenever you wish to go."

He hung his head and shook it wearily. "It is impossible," he said. "Surely you must know now mine isn't a life I can ask the woman I love to share."

"But you love me?"

"You know it."

"And you would leave me?"

"I must."

"Then," she made believe to sigh—"if you insist on having it that way—I can only presume you wish me to divorce you on the grounds of desertion."

"Divorce me!"

She went straightway to his bosom, clung to it in tears and laughter. "Will you ever forgive me—I wonder!—for taking advantage of your helplessness? As soon as possible after that accident, as soon as you were able to talk—we were married!"

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